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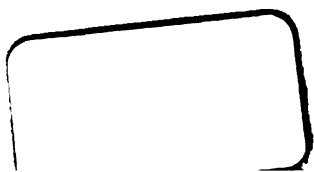
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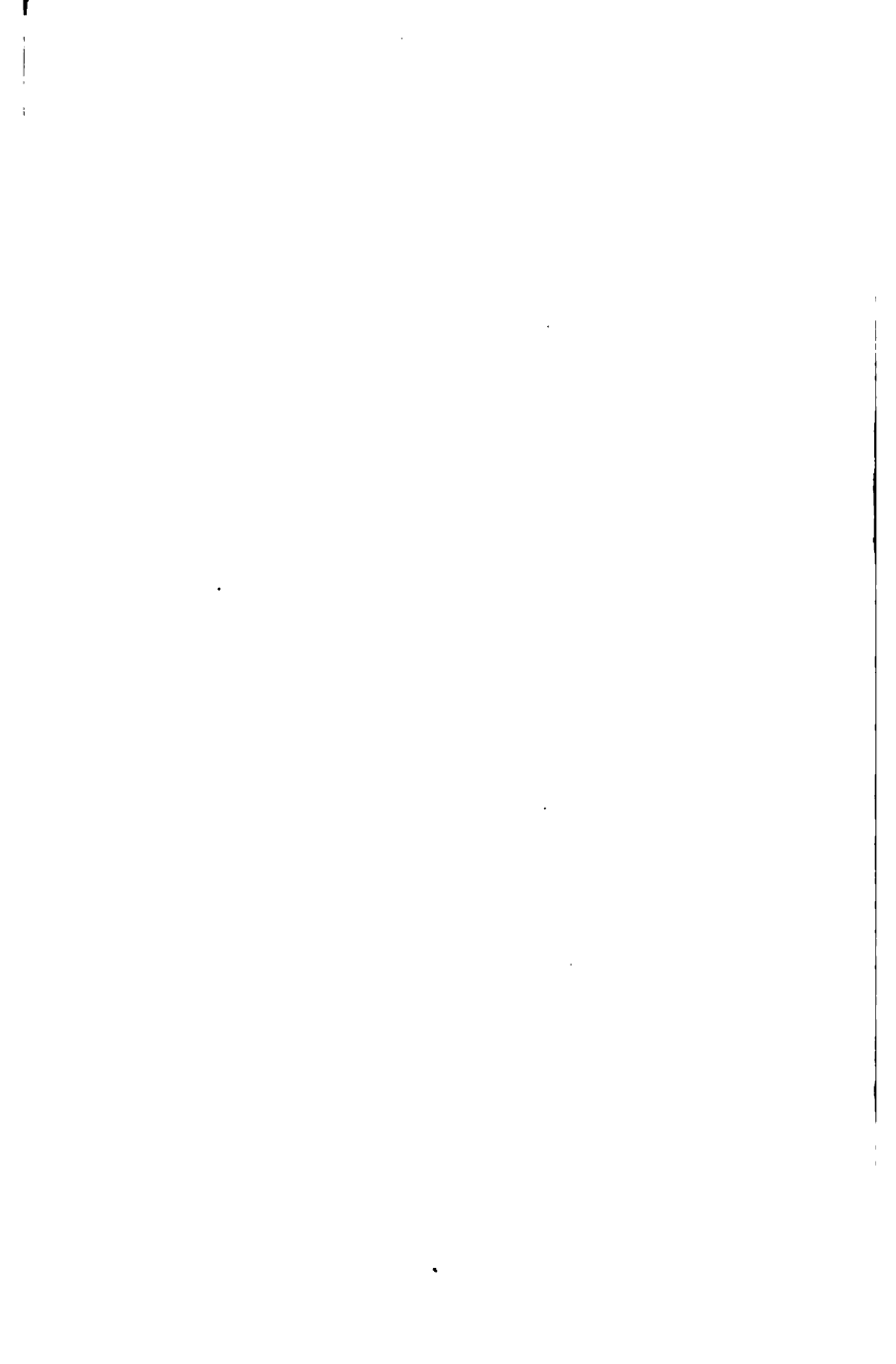
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NOV

Vickell





A DRAMA IN SUNSHINE



A DRAMA IN
SUNSHINE

A NOVEL

BY

HORACE ANNESLEY VACHELL

AUTHOR OF †

"THE HILL," "THE PROCESSION OF LIFE,"
"BROTHERS," ETC.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
THE PROLOGUE	1
I. SAUSAGES AND PALAVER	22
II. ILLUMINATION	48
III. WILLIAM CHILLINGWORTH	78
IV. CALAMITY CAÑON	108
V. SPECULATIONS	141
VI. WHICH CONTAINS A MORAL	168
VII. OF BLOOD AND WATER	205
VIII. WHICH ENDS IN FLAMES	240
IX. "IS WRIT IN MOODS AND FROWNS AND WRINKLES STRANGE"	275
X. THE DAUGHTERS OF THEMIS	319



A DRAMA IN SUNSHINE

THE PROLOGUE.

THE Rev. Abner Fish, tall, thin, round-shouldered, and shabby, entered a room.

A subdued smile suggesting future joys flickered pathetically around his clean-shaven mouth; and, as he crossed the threshold, his lips articulated a phrase—either prayer or salutation. Then softly closing the door, he stood hat in hand waiting for some word of welcome which was withheld.

“I trust you are better,” he faltered, advancing timidly.

“I’m past mending,” returned a voice, “at any rate physically. To that fact, I presume, I’m indebted for the honour of——”

“My visit. Yes. The doctor, who is a personal friend of mine, spoke to me about you, so I ventured to call.”

“Pray sit down. I can offer you nothing but a chair.”

The parson seated himself, not too near the bed, and glanced with professional interest at the patient, who submitted indifferently to the scrutiny.

"Once," he murmured languidly, "I was worthy of more than a passing regard from men and—er—women, but now——"

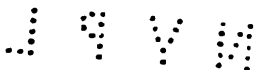
He laughed softly and melodiously. The parson withdrew his gaze.

The room was in disorder, presenting to the observer a panorama of poverty, disease, and dirt. Without, it rained heavily, the great drops of water falling with sullen and rhythmic splashes upon the wooden shingles. Within, the gas from a broken jet flared and flickered, to the eye of the parson ominously.

"It will soon be extinguished," said the man in bed, interpreting aright the thoughts of his visitor. "For two weary months I've been living with the lights turned down. I'm waiting hopefully for them to be turned out."

The parson, at a loss for a seasonable word, held his peace. A gleam from a dark corner challenged his attention. Against the crude plaster of the wall leaned a malacca cane—a sprightly, fashionable, silver-mounted cane, grotesquely out of keeping with its sordid environment.

"Yes," sighed the sick man; "that is my cane. It supported me during many years. It is, in fact, one of my oldest and most valued friends. But you see it stands jauntily enough awaiting the hand of another."



The parson's face expressed sympathy and compassion. He would have spoken, but, somehow, his very thoughts seemed an impertinence.

"Thank you," continued the sick man, "for not pitying me. Pity, from *you*"—he laid sarcastic emphasis upon the pronoun—"would be absurd."

"And why so?"

"I'm too tired to explain."

"In my experience," began the parson, didactically.

"Your experience! Why, man, your experience, compared with mine, is still unbreeched."

The parson bit his lip. Vanity was not his besetting sin, yet he prided himself upon a knowledge of things temporal. Sociology, so he modestly admitted to his friends, was his favourite study. He had graduated, *summa laude*, in a rough school—the wild and woolly west,—but his laurels wilted—and with them something of his benignity—beneath the glare of this stranger's cynicism. He had read his Terence, and liked the line—

"Homo sum : humani nil a me alienum puto."

But here was a "human" who distinctly repelled him, and was alien indeed to his sympathy and habitual courtesy. With an effort he choked down resentment.

"You can go if you like," murmured the dying man. "I never invited you here, and yet by staying, you may furnish me with some small entertainment, and yourself with instruction. You saints"—the sneer nettled the parson—"think you

know how to live; let a sinner show you how to die."

He laughed once more, and his listener shivered. The note of contrast was too shrilly discordant. Laughter from a dying man sets one's teeth on edge; it is demoralizing as the Carmagnole, disintegrating and upsetting. But the laughter was only one factor in the sum of the parson's discomposure. There was the silver-mounted cane grinning derision among the cobwebs; and the sufferer's restless eyes, which mocked the immobility of his features; and the ring upon his hand—a valuable intaglio—which glittered askance at the cheap, discoloured counterpane; and his voice, aristocratically silky, which emphasized the harsh cries of the hawkers who were selling viands below to humble customers, yet the street only a moment since, as the parson had stepped gingerly across the puddles, seemed quiet and peaceful.

He felt sorry that he had come; yet he stayed. "You don't look," faltered the parson, "like a dying man."

The sufferer raised his left hand and stroked his moustache.

"Glad to hear it on *your* account. Dying men, sometimes, look like the deuce; but the game is up—*rien ne va plus!*"

"You have—er—regrets?"

"No," replied the man, thoughtfully, "I have no regrets. I have lived—well, as few men can live, missing no opportunities of pleasure. I have

had money which I spent, getting, I trust, value received for every cent. I have had health—superb health; wit—more than falls to the lot of many; and, to crown my life, a capacity of enjoyment quite immeasurable. I have seen most of the world. I have done much that becomes a man; more, perhaps, that doesn't. From the latter I've derived the keenest pleasure. Now, health and money are exhausted. A purse may be filled, but a depleted system—never! Knowing this, I'm dying without regret, and as gracefully as circumstances permit. In my pocket-book are funds sufficient to pay the bills of undertaker and doctor. My ring and my cane I wish to be sent to my brother."

"Ah, you have a brother."

The parson's eye brightened. A brother argued a link with humanity.

"Yes," he yawned. "He, possibly, might not admit as much. Yes; my brother is Dennis Fabian."

The parson stared in amazement. Dennis Fabian was well known in San Francisco. He lived in a handsome house; he drove fast horses, and entertained distinguished strangers; yet his brother was dying in a tenement not a mile distant from the Fabian mansion.

"You've an expressive face," said the man on the bed, "and I'm willing to gratify your curiosity. A coldness exists between my brother and myself. Once, long ago, I thrashed him—thrashed him soundly; thrashed him with that very cane you see

yonder. If you examine it carefully you'll find marks, a crack here and there. I laid it across his shoulders with right good will. It was"—he laughed with infinite relish—"one of those opportunities of pleasure which I grasped promptly. Do you know my brother?"

"I have met Mr. Fabian."

"The most cold-blooded man in America, but I warmed him up—Gad! how the fellow whined!—and I made him beg pardon on his bended knees. You will give him that cane—eh? And the ring? There are memories connected with that ring. It has a story—it——"

His soft voice died away, and the parson, hurriedly approaching, saw that the man was overcome by weakness. Some stimulants, ammonia and brandy, stood ready for use upon a table. These were applied, and presently Fabian opened his large eyes and smiled.

"Cardiac," he muttered, "will you oblige me by carrying out my wishes in regard to this ring and my cane?"

The parson hesitated. "Yes," he said uneasily, "I will see that they are delivered to your brother."

"Thank you. Good night."

The abruptness of the dismissal palsied the words which quivered on the parson's lips. Fabian, watching him with idle curiosity, smiled.

"Pray unload yourself," he observed courteously. "You are staggering, I perceive, beneath the burthen

of spiritual responsibility. Please speak, if you think it will do you good."

The parson delivered himself, but the pains of the labour robbed his speech of coherence and force.

"You—you," he stammered, "are about to face your Maker."

"I fear," murmured Fabian, "that I cannot look forward to anything quite so interesting as that."

"Man," cried the priest, hotly, "can you jest at such a time?"

"Why not? Will whimpering avail me, or whining prayers?"

"Mr. Fabian," said the parson, a faint glow illuminating his careworn face, "I came here, at some personal inconvenience"—he glanced at his muddy shoes and damp clothes—"in your interest. You must acquit me of any unworthy motive."

"Assuredly. Go on."

"It has been my lot to stand beside many death-beds, but my experience to-night is entirely strange. Your attitude has been discourteous to me as a man, and disheartening to me as a priest."

"That will do, sir. I wish you for the last time good night."

"Stay; you must hear me out."

"As I cannot put you out," retorted Fabian, bitterly, "or kick you out"—the parson winced—"I presume I must. But cut it short."

He turned on his side, face to the wall, as the parson continued—

"Mr. Fabian, you are starting upon this journey in a spirit of levity which appals me. For it, you, an experienced traveller, have despised provision and preparation. That, you will say, is distinctly your own affair. But"—his voice deepened—"in the interest of others, I ask a favour."

"Ask it, Maître Corbeau, and go."

"The doctor told me, in the strictest confidence, something of your past life."

"The babbling idiot."

"You have wrought much evil."

"Curse you ; let me die in peace."

"Give *me*," cried the parson, "the right to undo, if I can, some of that evil. I'm alone in the world, with no ties save those which bind me to my Master. The innocent, Mr. Fabian, suffer, as you well know, for the sins of the guilty ; but their suffering is often cruelly aggravated by ignorance of its cause. Give me, I say, the privilege of marring the devil's handiwork. Will you die the less peacefully if you grant this request?"

"Do you think that you—*you!*—can dodge the devil? Or, as I prefer to put it, upset with your pitiful arm the inexorable laws of cause and effect? Bah!"

"God helping me, I believe that I can."

"And you would take upon your shoulders the burthen of reversing the devil's sentences?"

"I should carry my case to the Supreme Court hopefully."

"I've always been an accommodating sort of

fellow," muttered Fabian, "where the accommodation cost me nothing. And the experiment would prove of extraordinary interest, philosophically and physiologically, if only I could return—disembodied, of course—and watch the business. Why, really, it would be something to look forward to."

"I think, Mr. Fabian—nay, I firmly believe—that you can look forward to that; but whether the privilege will afford you the satisfaction you anticipate is another question."

The parson made his thrust and Fabian parried it with a laugh. He liked the priest better, and his tone, as he replied, had in it less levity, more respect.

"Your conception of heaven and hell is, I see, up to date. Well, I quarrel with no man's opinions. You and I look at life from the two points of view, the Pagan and the Christian. Any argument between us is impossible. But you will permit me to congratulate you upon your consistency. You practise what you preach. You die, your life must be a living death, a mortification of the flesh, that you may live. I have lived"—he sighed—"bearing in mind that I must die, and making the most of the golden hours. That, however, is neither here nor there. So you insist upon thrusting your hand into my personal affairs. If—if I give you a chance to harvest seed that may prove tares, you must hold me guiltless in the premises."

"Give me the chance."

"So be it. You have a pencil? Take down an

address : San José, The Garden City. Pretty flowers grow there."

He wandered on inaudibly, and the parson cocked his ear for some note of regret. This man, who strutted on the brink of the grave, glorying in his sins and grudging not the price of them, stirred his pulses strongly.

"When I am dead," said Fabian, sharply, as if awaking from a dream, "you can go to that address and take what you find there. It is yours. You are the residuary legatee. And now, perhaps, you will leave me."

The parson extended his hand, but Fabian ignored it.

"Good-bye," he said sadly. "Would that I could say, God speed you."

"According to you," returned Fabian, with his cold smile, "I am justified in replying *au revoir* ! If it be so, I shall watch your efforts with special interest."

As the parson descended the rickety stairs Fabian's laugh echoed pitifully in his ears. He was not a strong man, neither physically nor intellectually, and his weakness in both respects was a cross heavy to be borne. Fabian's laugh provoked distracting thoughts, for its insidious quality, like a drop of milk in a goblet of water, clouded the clarity of his faith, and marred its beauty. The "Spirit of Evil" had touched him as he passed by and he felt that virtue had gone out of him.

• • • • •

Three days later Fabian died, and was buried. The parson arrayed himself in his least shabby coat, and called upon the rich brother. He was received in the library.

"Pray sit down, Mr.—er?"

"Fish. The Rev. Abner Fish."

"Well, Mr. Fish, in what way can I serve you?"

The parson bit his nether lip. Dennis Fabian's large, clean, pink, handsome face was inscrutable.

"Your brother, sir," he began.

"My brother? I have no brother, sir."

"Then you have heard already that—that——"

"Speak out, sir."

"That he is dead."

The rich man turned pale, and his cigar fell from nerveless fingers.

"Dead?" he repeated blankly. "Where and when?"

"He died here in San Francisco the night before last as the tide ebbed. I was with him toward the end. He sent you these."

He tendered Fabian the intaglio ring and the cane.

"Keep them, sir. I have no use for either."

The door opened as he answered, and two pretty children ran forward and climbed upon the father's knee. He smiled and kissed them as they prattled gaily.

"Your children?" queried the parson.

"Yes, sir. Have you anything more to say?"

"Much. And the presence of these little ones

encourages me to speak out. You are fond of children, Mr. Fabian? That is plain to be seen."

"Of my own children—yes."

"Your brother," began the parson for the second time.

"My brother," echoed Fabian, harshly, "spent his substance in the most riotous living. I have been accused of hounding him down. That is a lie, not worth contradicting. As a matter of fact, I shielded him from the laws which he outraged, and silenced at heavy expense the voices of his enemies. He repaid my kindness with the blackest ingratitude"—Mr. Fabian glanced at the cane which the parson held in his right hand—"with—with blows, sir, as perhaps he had the effrontery to tell you. Now"—he heaved a sigh of relief—"he is dead, and, so far as I'm concerned, may rest in peace."

He caressed the children, who had listened agape to his vehement words, understanding nothing of their purport, but dismayed and frightened at the agitation of their father.

"Your brother," said the parson, for the third time, "has left a child."

Fabian drew in his breath.

"A little girl," continued the parson.

The children pricked up their ears.

"A little girl like me?" piped the daughter of the house.

"Very like you," smiled the parson.

"Is she provided for?" muttered Fabian.

"Yes and no. She is at present in a convent at

San José. The sisters will keep her, if necessary, but——”

He paused.

“Go on, sir,” muttered Fabian, his eyes moodily intent upon the pattern of the Turkish carpet.

“Her mother, Mr. Fabian, was——”

“A false woman,” said the millionaire, bitterly ; “false as Judas. I knew her well !”

“Have you any objections, Mr. Fabian, to my adopting this unfortunate child ?”

“Objections ! Why should I object ?”

“Your claim to her, the claim of blood, comes first. But if you repudiate that claim——”

“Repudiate ? I don’t like that word.”

“Nor I, Mr. Fabian.”

“You are insolent, sir.”

“God forbid ! I will wish you good morning.”

With awkward dignity he rose from his chair and turned to leave the room. The boy—a handsome urchin, blessed with large lustrous eyes—tugged impatiently at his long coat-tails. The parson, pausing, placed a thin hand upon the child’s curly head and smiled.

“What is it, my little man ?” he asked kindly.

“Where is my cousin ?” he inquired sharply.

“She is my cousin, isn’t she ?”

He appealed to his father, who nodded curtly.

“At the convent in San José.”

“I should like to see her,” continued the boy, with the imperiousness of an heir-apparent. “Will you bring her to see me ?”

"Gladly, if your father permits me."

A puzzled expression clouded his fine eyes. "But she is my cousin," he insisted. "I know all about cousins; nurse told me. And Joan and I"—he nodded eagerly at his sister, who had clambered upon Fabian's knee—"were wishing only this very morning for a real live cousin. Why, a cousin is nearly as good as a sister. Better, sometimes," he added quaintly, "because nurse says a man can marry his cousin, but not his sister. What is my cousin's name?"

"Damaris."

He clapped his small hands joyously. "By Jingo," he cried, "what a pretty name!" He slapped his small thigh with comical emphasis, and ran to his father. "Please, daddy," he said earnestly, "ask Damaris to come and live with us."

The parson, with his hand upon the door-knob, waited for the reply.

"The house," returned Mr. Fabian, with a constrained smile, "is too small."

"Ah," cried his son, "you're joshing, daddy, you know you're joshing." He turned to the parson and pointed a thin forefinger at his sire. "He is *such* a josher. Why, Joan and I never know when he's serious."

"Persons older and wiser than you," returned the parson, gravely, "have been confronted with the same difficulty."

"I'm serious now, my boy. This house is too small."

The words were emphatic enough, but the parson noted an inflection of indecision. A very child of impulse, despite the grey hairs upon his temples, he addressed Fabian eagerly.

"Hate, Mr. Fabian, is cramped in a palace; love can be comfortable in a cottage. Let me urge you to reconsider your decision. Give this poor orphan the companionship of these pretty children. Try the experiment, and if you repent I will take her, but she belongs to you. Nothing can sever the tie of blood but death."

The rich man eyed him coldly. His mouth, like the mouth of his brother, had a cynical twist. As the boy said, he was a "joshier," and he jested at unseasonable times upon many subjects which old-fashioned folk deemed sacred. Moreover, he trifled habitually with the feelings of others, not sparing his own children, whom he loved (with a curious frozen intensity) and indulged. This same indulgence had a cynical quality, a *reculer-pour-mieux-sauter* capacity which often confounded the children and provoked unavailing tears. Little minds discriminate with difficulty between liberty and licence, and Mr. Fabian was one of those fathers who allow their boys to overload their stomachs with fruit, and then laugh at them when they scream with colic.

"I want Damaris," persisted his son.

"You wanted to ride my horse," said Mr. Fabian, "but when he threw you over his head you howled for half an hour."

"Only half a minute," protested the urchin, with

a side glance at the parson. He seemed a plucky lad, with plenty of vitality and will of his own. "Besides, daddy, Damaris is a girl. A girl couldn't hurt me!"

"Wait!" returned his father, grimly. "The day may come when you will learn to your cost, sir, that a girl can hurt a grown man. And now, my dears, run away."

The girl obeyed, but the boy lingered.

"I'll take the chances, daddy," he pleaded. "Do send for Damaris. Joan and I get tired of playing by ourselves."

"That will do. Go!"

As the door closed, Mr. Fabian turned suddenly to the parson.

"Sit down," he said, not uncourteously. "I spoke too hastily; in the heat of the moment. Pardon me."

The parson bowed.

"You would persuade me to gratify the absurd whim of these children, although you know absolutely nothing of the facts in the case."

"I do know something, Mr. Fabian."

"Knowing nothing, I repeat, of the *facts*. My brother, I regret to say, was the most accomplished liar in America. Presuming upon his fictions, you venture to interfere."

"Interference is my business and my duty, not my pleasure."

"If," observed Mr. Fabian, "*if*, my dear sir, you can advance one good and sufficient reason to justify

my taking to my arms the child of a person who treated me with blackest ingratitude, I will"—he smiled queerly—"give it the consideration it—er—deserves."

"Do you believe in the doctrine of compensation?"

"My ideas on that subject, sir, have been made the subject of comment—in the press and on the rostrum."

"I'm not joking," replied the parson, biting his lip.

"I cannot understand you to seriously mean that I'm to find the reward of my patience and long-suffering in the person of Damaris."

"You can understand just that, Mr. Fabian. I can conceive of no nobler task than this. According to you, her parents, poor child, were evil and unprincipled. Latent in Damaris there must be—er—tendencies—er—a predisposition, a bias toward sin. This can be overcome."

"Hum—you think so?"

"Most assuredly. Your brother laughed at me."

"I see; the question of the child's adoption by me was discussed."

"No. The question of *my* taking charge of the child was indirectly talked over. Your brother, Mr. Fabian, expressed a cynical interest in what he called a psychological experiment. Of treating a diseased soul to a successful issue he had less confidence than you. I expect—God helping me—to prove to you and to *him* that good, even in this world, triumphs over evil."

"Prove to *him*," repeated Fabian, sharply. "Why, the man is dead."

"He is buried," returned the Rev. Abner, solemnly; "but his spirit, the ego, the immortal part of him, was of the earth earthy, and it is constrained to linger here."

His eyes, the eyes of a mystic, encountered gravely the cold grey orbs of Fabian.

"Here," pursued the parson, in the calm tones of faith, "where he wrought mightily in the interest of his master, Satan, he must be condemned to linger and to suffer."

The rosy colour faded suddenly from the cheeks of Fabian. The personal magnetism of the speaker thrilled him through and through, and his brain, his strong masterful brain, quivered and vibrated in the grasp of another.

"He might have made reparation," continued the parson, in the same impressive tone, "but he scorned *that*. He swaggered into eternity with a jest upon his lips; but think you that he laughs *now*?"

He leaned forward in his chair, gripping with nervous fingers the leather arms, no longer man, but inquisitor. His face, against the background of gilded books, gleamed pallid and luminous; the jaw protruded, and the ascetic lips were grimly compressed; the eyes, beneath shaggy brows, glittered; the thin nostrils dilated; the muscles upon the man's body were tense and strained in a very passion of interrogation. Mr. Fabian shaded

his features with a trembling hand, and held his peace.

"Pardon me," said the parson, lying back wearily, "I had no right to distress you."

The rich man made no response. His thoughts were running amôk, tilting at the phantoms of the past. The parson continued in a softer, less aggressive tone.

"Mr. Fabian, the threads of all our lives are so interwoven that no man may presume to disentangle them. Who can say, save One, where responsibility begins or ceases, where influence fertilizes or corrupts, where heredity blesses or blights? I do not ask—I do not care to know of the relations which existed between your unhappy brother and yourself. But can you afford, as a Christian" (Mr. Fabian was a massive pillar of the Presbyterian Church), "to ignore the claims of this orphan? Believe me that I plead unselfishly. I have a wife, but no children. I will take this child gladly, thankfully, to my heart; but"—he hesitated and stammered—"I'm very poor, and unable to give her"—he glanced pathetically at the silken curtains, the brocaded *portières*, the pictures and books—"more than mere food and shelter."

"You have a wife, you say?"

"Yes; a woman much younger than I."

"You live here—in San Francisco?"

"Yes; but my health is failing. The bishop proposes to send me to San Lorenzo."

"If you keep this child, you will adopt her as

your own. She will take your name—know no other?”

“Yes.”

“Did my—er—brother speak to you of the mother?”

“He said that she was dead.”

“Nothing more?”

“Not a word.”

“You must be curious to know more?”

“I am not a curious man.”

Mr. Fabian eyed him steadily. He boasted, not without reason, that his first judgments of men were seldom reversed. This shabby parson, apparently was honest.

“That is well,” he replied coldly. “I shall not take this child, sir; but you have done your duty in giving me the refusal of her. She is now yours. Her mother was a lady by birth—accomplished, witty, a beauty, and utterly worthless. If—if you can redeem her daughter, you shall have my congratulations. Good morning.”

“This ring,” said the Rev. Abner, nervously, “is of value; and your brother wished you to have it.”

“That ring,” replied Fabian, slowly, “once belonged to me. I bought it in Egypt. It’s an antique of great value. And it has a history not worth repeating. My brother, like most sceptics, was at heart superstitious. He attributed to this gem certain properties that as a Christian I refuse to believe in. Keep the ring, sir, for the child; or—sell it.”

The Rev. Abner walked down the slopes of Rincon Hill with a sense of disquietude rankling in his heart and head. Men of sorts and conditions he met daily in fellowship and sympathy, but the Fabian brothers had puzzled and distressed him.

"Have I done well or ill?" he murmured, remembering with sundry qualms that his wife, in ignorance of what had passed, might be unprepared to welcome this waif. Not being able to answer the question, he submitted it prayerfully to his Master.

Dennis Fabian, at the same moment, was pacing his library. But the doubts that perturbed the parson he had already disposed of. He had done well. Yet the face and words of the man who held such absurd theories upon the condition of departed spirits haunted him, and distracted his attention from important material matters. Presently he sat down and made a brief entry in a diary; then paused—pen in hand. "His name?" he muttered. "What was the fellow's name?" He rang the bell, and questioned a servant. The Rev. Abner, it seemed, had presented no card. The butler regretted that the gentleman's name had entirely escaped his memory.

"After all," thought Fabian, as he closed his diary, "his name is of no consequence. So far as I'm concerned, the child is dead."

CHAPTER I.

SAUSAGES AND PALAVER.

UPON a pleasant spring morning, in the year 1881, Stephen Cassidy, the sheriff of San Lorenzo County, a huge, rawboned Irishman, marshalled his deputies on the flat, low-lying ground behind the mission church. To his left, looking north-west, rose the triune peak of the Bishop flanking the San Lorenzo mountain, and to the south lay the town.

Smellfungus—the reader will remember what he said of the Pantheon—might have cursed San Lorenzo for a mal-odorous, priest-ridden, Jew-stricken conglomeration of ill-built houses and slovenly streets; Charles Kingsley, on the contrary, would have found things of beauty—*protozoa*, *rhizopods*, *rotiferæ*, and what not—in the ooze of the creek. But to the average observer, the beauty and the ugliness, the glory and the shame, of the quaint old mission town lie side by side, eternally contrasted—like the good and evil in a human heart. For Nature has done much for San Lorenzo. To the east, spanning the horizon, are the Santa Lucia mountains, the Coast Range; and to the west

is a pleasant champaign, green foothills and fertile valleys, where may be seen to-day orchards, vineyards, meadows of rich alfalfa, berry patches innumerable—the signs and symbols of prosperity. Beyond these may be found pastures studded with live oaks and sycamores. And across the fair face of this landscape, in fine weather or foul, floats the voice of the Pacific.

In 1864—the terrible dry year—Don Ramon del Pliego held sovereign sway over the lands just described, known then as the San Julian Rancho. During the drought all his cattle perished, and to restock his ranges he was compelled to borrow large sums of money. These were advanced by Dennis Fabian, who took, as security, a mortgage upon the eleven leagues of the San Julian. To this grant no title had been approved by the Board of Land Commissioners. Don Ramon had duly submitted to the Board his papers and documents, and, these being pronounced invalid, had finally appealed to the Supreme Court. Pending the settlement of his case, the old gentleman died, and his son, a spendthrift, sold all the cattle, and took no steps to push his claims at Washington. It was generally conceded that there was no just title to the land. The young man abandoned the fine *adobe* house that faced the ocean, betook himself to the city of Mexico, and there fell a victim to cholera. Upon news of his death squatters took possession of the grant lands. They were Irishmen for the most part, and in due time the San Julian was rechristened

Ireland. Meantime, Dennis Fabian had quietly foreclosed the original mortgage, and commenced proceedings at Washington to acquire title. He had the best land-lawyer in America in his pay, and no man pulled the strings of the political puppet-show with surer hands; but ten years of litigation elapsed before he received, under the seal of the President of the United States, the letters patent of the grant. The squatters, who had taken up their claims on the understanding that the big rancho was public land, were ignorant and indolent. If the question of title cropped up, as it did occasionally, they winked facetiously, and quoted the statute of limitations. They were not aware that this statute only applies to patented lands; and, the title to the San Julian being inchoate, the statute had not commenced to run.

But the squatters, it may be said, should have pooled their interests and fought Fabian at Washington. The history of a hundred cases tells us that this obvious line of defence was seldom adopted. Nine times out of ten—alas! for the fair fame of California!—the land-shark gobbled the acres of the squatters, and Justice hung her head. It has been asserted that the judiciary were bought right and left. With the evidence (purely negative) submitted, the accusation falls to the ground. Opportunities to accept bribes were as the sands of the sea for number, but nearly all of the judges of the District and Circuit Courts in California were and *remained* poor men. In the opinion of the San

Francisco bar these gentlemen were incorruptible. The dirty work, the lying, the forging, the black-mailing, and the bribery, were done by others. After the discovery of gold California was swarming with the pariahs of all the nations, and the dogs had their day!

In 1880 the squatters upon the San Julian were served with writs of ejectment.

Before six months had passed Ireland was in revolt. Word came to William Chillingworth, Fabian's San Lorenzo lawyer, that the settlers were prepared to fight; that the men were armed and under oath to resist the law; that women, even, were in the ranks; that children, astride bare-backed broncos, were patrolling the ridges and cañons. Chillingworth reported to Fabian, and received in reply a long letter of instructions.

"I employed you," wrote the land baron, "because I understood, upon good authority, that you could wag your tongue, but a show of force may be necessary. Use the sheriff; he is under obligations to me. . . . I am most anxious to avoid scandal. . . . I trust to your tact and common sense."

Chillingworth had never met Fabian, but after reading this letter, too long to quote in full, he realized that he was serving a remarkable man.

Accordingly, Cassidy enrolled beneath his banner many deputies, and named as trysting-place the meadow behind the Catholic church, which lent neither sanction nor sympathy to Dennis Fabian.

Father Rochelle, so said the people, was indignant at the violation, upon the part of the strong, of the property rights of the weak, and his indignation found forcible words. The deputies listened respectfully to the *padre*, but feared that the law must be obeyed. Father Rochelle was assured that the poor Irish, good Catholics all of them, were *hombres de muchos amigos*—men of many friends. He would see, if he lived till morning, that a Protestant like Stephen Cassidy was easily fooled! So they took savoury counsel together, and evolved a guileful plan, sweetened with humour and that charity which covers a multitude of sins, including even the slaughter of a fat steer (with another's brand upon its quarter), and the abuse of strong waters. Big Anton, the greaser, told Carmela, his black-eyed, brown-skinned wife, that a mighty surprise was in store for Cassidy, and Carmela told the news to Pepita, and after that the women in Spanish town were too excited to go to bed, but stood in groups upon the corners of Santa Rosa Street, chattering like magpies, screaming like blue jays, and invoking all the saints in the calendar.

"*Madre de Dios!*" said Carmela, "but it will be a *fiesta* for the poor Irishmen. *Ay de mi! a fiesta!*"

On the morrow Anton headed the procession, sitting upright upon his sorrel stallion, and wreathed from hat to spurred heel with strings and garlands of jerky! Behind the giant rode the others, armed to the teeth with hams, loaves

of white bread, meat, onions, sausages, and wine. Father Rochelle stood upon the steps of the ancient mission, and blessed his children as they passed laughing by.

"D—n 'em," growled Cassidy. "The blamed Indians think this a circus."

"And why not?" replied William Chillingworth. "A barbecue is better than a battle. I'd sooner chew beef than a bullet. These sausages, Steve, will prove our writs of ejectionment."

Cassidy coughed aggressively and turned aside. He knew by experience that Chillingworth, despite his joviality, was not to be trifled with by Indians or sheriffs. The lawyer rode on to where a couple of women were standing.

"The Latin race," he said quietly, "loves a masquerade."

His handsome face provoked ready smiles.

"I declare," said the elder of the women, a well-rounded widow, not fat nor yet forty—"I declare, Mr. Chillingworth, that I couldn't sleep a wink last night."

Chillingworth's glance rested upon the girl beside her. She was smaller than the widow and more delicately fashioned, a most dainty maiden, with nose and chin of excellent design, dark tresses—with threads of gold in them, like sunbeams in a cypress thicket—and large luminous hazel eyes deeply set beneath black brows. Her skin was clear but colourless, in striking contrast to the pink complexion of her mother.

"Indeed," said he, without inquiring the reason of the vigil, "I'm sorry to hear that, Mrs. Fish. I hope that Damaris was more fortunate?"

"I slept soundly," said the girl.

"I can't rest when a friend's life is at stake," murmured Mrs. Fish. "Dear me, the whole town is here. There is Mrs. Skenk and her three girls. It seems only yesterday they were running about in pinafores. Yes, she's a good kind woman."

"She is," said the lawyer, emphatically. "I'm in her debt for ten years' excellent board and lodging. Good-bye."

He lifted his hat to the widow, but held out his hand to Damaris. As soon as he had gone Mrs. Fish said fretfully—

"I am surprised. I couldn't have believed it if he hadn't said so. Ten years' board and lodging. And I always thought he paid his bills the first o' the month!"

Damaris smiled. Fine shades of meaning were lost upon the widow.

"Be sure, mother," she replied, "that Mr. Chillingworth owes Mrs. Skenk nothing but gratitude."

"He's a handsome man," sighed the widow. "Beautiful eyes he has."

"They looked hard this morning; blue eyes sometimes do. Look! he is waving to us."

She drew her own handkerchief from her pocket, but the trade-wind, blowing strongly from the northwest, tore it from her grasp, and it fluttered like a big white bird some fifty yards. Anton clapped

spurs to his horse and, at full gallop, leaning far out of his heavy saddle, snatched it from the ground. He returned it to the girl with a bow that a courtier might have envied. Then he rejoined Chillingworth.

"I've a five-dollar gold piece here," said the lawyer. "Can you pick that up?"

He threw it on to the road as he spoke. The greaser's dark eyes glittered like the gold in the dusty road. If Chillingworth wished to reward a graceful act he could have chosen no happier mode. Anton tightened his cinch and retreated a score of yards. The women held their breath, and Carmela murmured a prayer to the Virgin. The road was hard as iron, and a fall meant a funeral, which, amusing from a Mexican point of view, has none the less objectionable features. Anton, however, was not destined to furnish entertainment to his friends as a corpse. He picked up the coin without apparent effort, and slipped it into his pocket. The Indians applauded.

"Let us start," said Chillingworth.

Cassidy growled dissent. "Are you serious?"

"In this case—yes."

"What good will it do?"

"That is what I propose to find out."

The sheriff gave the word to advance, and Chillingworth joined Anton. On the road to Ireland—a bad road, seamed with chuck-holes and bristling with big flints and boulders—he conversed gaily with him and with the other deputies, speaking

the lisping Spanish with ease and fluency, and an amazing command of slang. Winding through the San Julian cañon—known to-day as Calamity Cañon—his laugh echoed loudly amongst the caves and hollows in the cliffs where the bees were swarming and the turkey-buzzards built their nests. But he listened gravely enough to what Anton had to tell of Don Ramon del Pliego. The greaser had brains in his big head, and his memory for details astounded the lawyer unversed in oral traditions.

“Don Ramon’s father, señor, was an *empresario*, a leader of a colony. And the governor gave him the San Julian; but the grant was never confirmed by the authorities.”

“How do you know that?” said the lawyer, sharply.

Anton shrugged his massive shoulders. “I have heard Don Ramon say so. I worked for him as a boy. There was a *diseño*,” he continued, “a rough map, and the *informe*, the report of the prefect; but, señor, there was no certificate.”

“You are mistaken, Anton.”

“May be,” he said slyly, “these were added afterwards.”

Chillingworth laughed. He reflected that this gossip in regard to a title passed upon by the highest tribunal in the land was irrelevant, and none of his business.

“That is why,” said Anton, softly, “the squatter came here. It is hard on them, señor, terribly hard.”

They had ridden as far as the head of the cañon, and paused upon the top of the divide. At their feet lay Ireland, a rough enough country to be sure, but well-watered and knee deep in alfilaria.

“Plenty of feed, Anton.”

His eyes sparkled as he allowed them to linger upon the landscape absorbing greedily this placid loveliness. The trade-wind in the pine-tops chanted a spring song of peace and plenty. The hillsides were golden with *eschscholtzias*, purple with lupin, silver-grey with sage. In the gulches below the cock-quail were challenging, their flute-like notes quivering upon the ear; and to the left, the horizon, where it kissed the ocean, was piled high with clouds, fleecy masses of mist, marvels of prismatic colour, resplendent with opalescent tints, luminous with the tenderest tones.

“Fabian,” murmured the lawyer to himself, “wants the whole earth, but I would be satisfied with this.”

He turned to the greaser. “You have good eyes. Tell me—are those the squatters?”

Far down the slopes of the foothills, a couple of miles distant, like a smudge upon the face of the landscape, was a mirk mass of men or cattle.

“Yes, señor. They are awaiting us!”

Cassidy, who had ridden from town in sullen silence, now approached, and pointed expressively at the rebels. Flashes of light, the gleam of rifles and guns, betrayed an armed force.

"A fool's errand," said he, bitterly.

"Cheer up, Steve," retorted Chillingworth. "I'm going to fight these fellows with sausages and palaver. I find there is a grudge against Mellish, the ringleader. He's a quarrelsome brute, and——"

"He wants to quarrel with me," said the sheriff. "Those O'Connors, too, have been talking. Ever since my election there's been bad blood between us, because an Ulster man got the office. We might have settled matters to-day if——"

"Steve," said the lawyer, pleasantly, "go home. Make a bee-line for town. I can handle this business alone. Leave it to me. I'm well liked by the Catholics. Go home, old man."

The sheriff nodded obedience, but half sullenly. A rabid Protestant, he had been elected under republican auspices, defeating his predecessor, an easy-going democrat, who had been notoriously lax in the discharge of official duties. The contest had been bitter, and to the end so doubtful that extraordinary means were employed to procure votes. But behind Cassidy was the "sack," as the expression is, of Fabian, and the keen brains of Chillingworth. These had triumphed against Catholicism and a democratic majority.

Cassidy, recalling the sum of his obligations to Chillingworth, turned his horse's head towards San Lorenzo. He would have enjoyed an exchange of hostilities with Mike Mellish and the O'Connors, but he consoled himself with the reflection that Fabian was not likely to be beaten at a game of

bluff. The squatters had called a veteran poker player, but the land baron held the winning cards, and time stood sponsor to him.

"Perhaps," said Chillingworth to Anton, "it would be wise to tell these good people that we have prepared a surprise for them. Gallop ahead; and here"—he handed him a twenty-dollar piece—"kill all the broilers in Ireland."

The giant headed his sorrel straight down the hill, the string of jerky rattling and flapping the flanks of the stallion. Never did envoy bear a stranger banner of truce! The cavalcade followed discreetly, at a walk. Chillingworth lingered upon the summit.

"My share," he murmured, "ought to be two leagues. Fabian pays his servants well. That fool"—he apostrophized the vanishing sheriff—"would sooner fight than eat!"

Then he, too, rode down the flowery slopes, turning over on the tip of his tongue a sugared phrase, storing with verbal bombs that goodly arsenal, his brain. Half an hour later he was shaking hands with the squatters, chaffing the girls, patting the babies' heads, and provoking laughter whenever he opened his lips. But Mike Mellish, tall, saturnine, with gigantic limbs and bronzed, line-seamed face, stood apart. He mistrusted these swarthy deputies and their gifts.

"Och, Mike!" yelled a neighbour, "you ugly brute! Take the kinks out of yer mug, ould son, wid a taste o' this."

He tendered the frowning Mike a bologna sausage, which the surly chieftain refused.

"It's a cilibration, Mickey—a cilibration."

"For some, maybe," he retorted harshly, "but not for me!"

His mother, a wizened crone from the banks of the Shannon, urged him in Irish to return home.

"I'll stay here," he replied, with an oath, "and learn what this manes."

As he answered, he strode forward and confronted Chillingworth. The crowd respectfully made way. The lawyer looked up and smiled.

"How do you do," he said pleasantly.

"I'm well," said Mike. "But, be Gob! it's sorry I am to see an honest man like William Chillingworth doing the work o' that dirty thafe, Dennis Fabian."

The chattering of the women died away; the grins upon the faces of the men faded; the laughter of the children was suddenly hushed.

"Yes," said Chillingworth, quietly; "I'm proud to serve Mr. Dennis Fabian. In his interests and in your interests, I am here to-day."

He crowed bravely, and a murmur of sympathy rippled through the crowd.

"Och! the swate voice to him!" said a woman.

"Do ye value yure loife, man!" said Michael, savagely.

"It's worth something," said the lawyer, carelessly—"more to these *people*"—he glanced cheerily at the faces upturned to his—"than yours!"

"Listen to him, now," said the woman who had spoken before. "Isn't he the boy to talk to Mickey: an' the aisy way he has."

An orator must have the sympathy of his audience. Chillingworth, knowing something—not much, but enough—of Mike's unpopularity, caught his cue, and smiled in his sleeve.

"I'm older than you, Mr. Mellish," he continued suavely, sure at last of himself and the effect of his words upon the peasants, "and I take the liberty of telling you that you have made a serious blunder. By what right have you incited your neighbours to risk their valuable lives and property? Do you know what punishment the law metes out for such offences?"

Mike glared savagely at the oily-tongued Chillingworth.

"For tin cints," he retorted, "I'd put a head on yez."

"Well," returned the lawyer, with a droll side glance at the crowd, "be sure, Mr. Mellish, and put a better head on my shoulders than your father and mother put on yours."

The crowd roared, and the unhappy Mike fingered his rifle.

"Be careful," he growled.

"I'm afraid of your blunders," said Chillingworth, contemptuously, "but not of your blunderbuss!"

He pointed derisively at the old-fashioned weapon, and the crowd roared again.

"I came here"—he spread out his hands—"an

unarmed man, to talk sense. If you care to listen to what I have to say, pray remain. If not—go!”

The women nudged each other and giggled.

“Will you go, Mr. Mellish, or stay?”

Mike, impotent with wrath, stalked from the ring. The crowd jeered, and he turned.

“Ay, ay,” he cried bitterly. “It’s laughin’ ye are, ye blatherin’ idjits; but for ivery grin on yure smug faces, ther’ll be tin thousand tears! To the foul fiend wid ivery mother’s son of yez!”

“My friends,” began Chillingworth, as Mellish strode towards his house, “I’ve come, you see, as a peacemaker, bringing not swords but sausages. If I’d thought that this misunderstanding between you and Dennis Fabian could only be settled by fighting, I’d have stayed at home. I’m no fighter. Why, the sight of Mike scares me to death!”

“Divil a bit!” said a voice, and the crowd grinned.

The lawyer might confess himself a coward if he pleased, but the boys knew better.

“I try to keep out of scrapes,” continued Chillingworth, “because I’m no foot-racer. When it comes to running, the other fellow always catches me.” Then he dropped his bantering tone and spoke gravely. “And now, my friends, I want to try and set you right upon some important points. You will listen patiently and goodhumouredly I know; but I’m going to speak plainly, and those who fear the truth can retire.”

He paused, but none stirred from his place.

"Coming from the old country," he said softly, "where you have suffered wrongs at the hands of an alien Government, it is natural enough that you should bring with you old country ideas and prejudices. You think, for instance—and God knows I don't blame you—that the Government here is against the interests of the poor man. This is a grave mistake. In America the government is by the people and for the people. You, all of you, support the Government, the Government does not, and was never intended to support you. So, when you, honest, well-meaning folks, abuse your own Government, the Government which you have made, you are really calling yourselves bad names, advertising to the world your own incapacity, and fouling your own nest."

"Thru for you," said the crowd.

"Salt that down, boys, and don't waste your valuable energies abusing or fighting Uncle Sam."

"Hurroo for Uncle Sam!" cried a gentleman from Cork.

"With all my heart; but Uncle Sam, boys, will stand no foolishness, remember that! Some of you have an idea that there are two kinds of law in America, a law for the rich and a law for the poor. It is not so. There is one law, but it is not always administered properly."

"Faith, it's Dinnis Fabian who sees to that."

"Indeed," returned the orator, fixing the speaker with a keen blue eye, "perhaps you know Dennis Fabian better than I do. Let me tell you a little

story. I had a man arrested the other day for embezzlement. You know what that means. I had entrusted some of my money to him, and he robbed me of every cent. I proved my case to the satisfaction of judge and jury, but the latter refused to punish the man, because, as the foreman of the jury said, he was a poor man, and had not taken *very much!*”

“An illigant foreman, bedad!” remarked the Corkian, who followed with comment and criticism each period of the discourse.

“Nine times out of ten public sympathy is with the poor man, boys, and against the rich. Take your own case. The sympathy of San Lorenzo County is with you and against Dennis Fabian, and yet”—he glanced humorously round the circle of faces—“and yet the facts are that he paid gold coin for this ranch, the San Julian, and that his title to it has been proven in open court; and, boys, Uncle Sam will sustain the decisions of his courts against ten, aye, fifty thousand squatters!”

A growl rumbled through the assembly.

“Uncle Sam,” continued Chillingworth, coolly, “spent a good many millions several years ago because certain persons, some of them as honest as you are, had the temerity and stupidity to dispute his supreme authority. You know all about that, so I’ll say no more. Now, we will suppose for a moment that Mr. Fabian leaves you in possession of the land which Uncle Sam says does not belong to you. What then? You will go ahead and improve

your claims. You will fence them and clear them. You will make this land—it's poor enough land—worth ten times the sum per acre which it is worth to-day, but you will never be able to sell it or trade it, because no lawyer in the State of California will admit the validity of your patents and deeds, and every hour of labour which you devote to the improvement of your homes will, in the-end, be so much hard cash in the pocket of the man you think your worst enemy—Dennis Fabian !”

At these ominous words dismay circulated with nimble feet. A woman burst into loud lamentation, and the men gazed anxiously into each other's faces.

“Fortunately for you, boys, Mr. Fabian is not your enemy, but your friend. He could turn you neck and crop into the wilderness, but he has no such intention. I am commissioned by him to pay you handsomely for your improvements, to offer you in exchange homes elsewhere, or to lease to you on favourable terms the land you already occupy. I shall stay here a few days and become personally acquainted with you. My time will be at your disposal. That is all for the present.”

* * * * *

The deputy sheriffs returned—as soon as the writs of ejectment were served and consumed—to San Lorenzo, but big Anton, the greaser, and Chillingworth remained in Ireland. During the days which followed they rode hither and thither, asking questions, harmless little questions, and making

speeches. Anton asked the questions and the lawyer made the speeches. Capital speeches! Seasoned to the people's taste. Strong and pungent as a Mission Street *tamale*.

The orator dwelt at length upon the poverty of the soil.

"An' divil a lie does he tell," said the women, with wonder stamped upon their faces. "It's the God's truth he's givin' us. The counthry's dhry, he says, an', faith, wid the taste of last year in our mouths don't we know it."

Mike Mellish remained at home planting garden stuff, and scowling fiercely when a neighbour rode by; but his mother limped from farm to farm, gleaning full sheaves of gossip, which she laid triumphantly before her son.

"Buying 'em out, is he," said Mr. Mellish, cursing copiously, "an' colonizing them lands in Tulare which that dirty thafe, his master, stole from the State! An' maybe he'll come to me, Mike Mellish, wid an offer! Isn't his eye on my land? An' wouldn't he like to thrade?"

His mother crooned applause, and Mike fed his resentment with whisky and allopathic doses of maternal flattery. He knew that his fickle friends had deserted him; that his counsels no longer prevailed, nay, were held in derision; that men shunned him; that the women, when he went abroad, returned his greetings coldly, with averted faces. These things he knew, and the knowledge festered in his heart. Finally, he saddled his rough

pony and paid a visit to the good *padre*, Father Rochelle, who listened patiently and pitifully to his story. When Mellish had recited the facts, the priest sighed. No man knew better than he that the fight was hopeless, and resistance futile. He had done his best to prevent bloodshed. The deputies had marched out and marched back, and, thanks to his influence, nothing had been spilled save a few gallons of claret and beer.

"Mike," he said, in excellent English, "take what this man offers, and buy another ranch. Land is cheap and good dollars scarce."

"Sell out!" screamed Mellish. "Niver!"

The *padre* drew a bundle of matches from his pocket, those odious, odorous sulphur matches dear to the Californian. He tried with his feeble finger to break the bunch, but failed. Then breaking off a single match, he snapped it in twain, and showed the pieces to Mellish. The warning, old as the centuries but new to the raw Irishman, needed no words.

"An' ye think he'll do that same to me," cried Mike, derisively; "but I'm not aisily broken."

The *padre* shook his head. He was a man of few words and many sympathies.

"It's me land, me own land," said Mellish, violently, "an' be Gob! I'll hould it."

He spurred his mustang to the nearest saloon, and began drinking heavily, pouring down the raw whisky as if it were water, and treating all comers. At each successive round of drinks, he proposed in thickening accents the same toast.

"Perdition to land thaves, an' thim as serve 'em!"

The gentlemen who drank at Mike's expense had no objections, but they nudged each other and grinned. Some of them were cognizant of the state of affairs in Ireland, and sympathized with Mellish. The name of Cassidy was mentioned, and the atmosphere became sulphurous with oaths.

"Let the blagyard come," said Mike. "The sooner the better. It's a foine wilcome I'll be givin' Mr. Cassidy. Ye can gamble yer sowls on that."

This and more so long as the whisky flowed. Of course a friend advised the sheriff of his enemy's presence in San Lorenzo, but Steve shrugged his shoulders and wisely held aloof.

At daybreak Mike reeled out of the saloon and scrambled on to the back of his horse. His money—hard-earned dollars—was gone, and with it his bluster and braggadocio. The morning breeze made his red eyes tingle, and the roughness of the road provoked curses and nausea. At the top of the divide he dismounted, tied his horse to a scrub-oak, lay down in the shade, and slumbered stertorously for a couple of hours. He awoke refreshed, and stretched his huge limbs with the enjoyment of a savage, snuffing up the scented air and expanding his immense chest. From the cañon below came the lowing of cattle and the bleating of sheep and weaned calves. The morning fog had lifted and parted; the main body of it, thick and opaque, floated languidly between the two mountains, the

San Lorenzo and the Bishop's peak, but to the north the mist had scattered like a flock of sheep before coyotes, and the sky was strewn with diaphanous streamers, soft as tulle, and gleaming with prismatic colours. Mellish walked to and fro assimilating the sights and sounds. The man had a touch of poetry—what Irishman has not?—in his make-up, and the thought came to him that these were his breakfast, a feast indeed for the soul. He could descry, in the middle distance, the familiar landmarks and boundaries of his ranch. The core of the San Julian belonged to him, and the big spring, bubbling generously from the rocks, proclaimed his title to the rough land beyond. His claim embraced one hundred and sixty acres, but, thanks to the spring, his steers wandered upon a league or more of goodly pasturage, steep hills, sage clad, but rich in grasses, upon which the eyes of the neighbours gloated enviously. During the dry years, when the other springs had failed, *his*—he chuckled at the thought—had furnished an abundance of water; and by using the moss upon the trees, and the tender shoots of the under-brush, he had tided his starving beasts over the awful months of sunshine. To save them he had toiled early and late, rising at three and four in the morning, and retiring, *founded*, at nightfall.

His eye softened as he caught the reek of smoke from a cabin to the right.

“I'll take a bite wid Norah,” he muttered, tightening the cinch of his saddle, “an' maybe a word

from me to the ould man will make the craythur see the divilment of Chillingworth an' Fabian."

Norah O'Connor, with her three big brothers and a widowed father, occupied a hillside claim to the south-west of Mike's land. For eighteen months or more gossip had linked together the names of Mellish and the girl, and it was well understood in Ireland that a marriage feast would crown the coming hay-harvest. The O'Connors were a thriftless race, but the girl Norah was a good, careful body and an excellent housekeeper, busy as a bee from sun-up to sun-down, with a cheery smile upon a broad mouth and a twinkle in her black-lashed eyes. Of suitors she had had a score or more, but, curiously enough, she preferred the ugly giant Mellish; and thus, partly from pique and partly from a profound respect for the giant's thews and sinews, the *soupirants* kept their distance and left pretty Norah alone.

Mellish found the men abroad and Norah in the rude kitchen. He greeted his sweetheart sheepishly, and, depositing his sombrero upon the floor (beaten *adobe*), perched himself awkwardly upon the extreme edge of a rickety chair.

"Yure a stranger, Mr. Mellish," said Norah, tossing her head.

"Aye," returned Mike, briefly.

His eyes lingered upon the girl's form delightfully outlined beneath a simple dress. Her sleeves were rolled to the elbow, displaying faultless fore-arms and brown, capable hands. Her cheeks were

flushed by hard work, and her lips were curved in a happy smile.

"Ye've come to tell me good-bye," said Norah, ironing furiously, but with a coquettish side glance at her lover.

"Good-bye," gasped Mike. "What d'ye mane?"

"We've sold out—at the old man's price, too."

"The hell ye have!"

Norah nodded and blushed. Mike's discomfiture had a significance that tickled her vanity. What woman can forswear coquetry?

"But we're to be married in June, Norah?"

"It's little ye care," she whispered coyly.

He jumped to his feet, upsetting the chair, and protesting hotly. "Not care? Holy smoke! What quare notions! Wouldn't he kiss the very ground she walked on? To be sure."

"If it's the ground ye like," said Norah, archly, "I'm lavin' that behind me."

"I'm crazy wid love of yez, my darlint!"

He sprang towards her with arms outstretched, but she waved him back, brandishing the flat-iron in his face, and laughing gleefully. Suddenly her mood changed from lively to severe, and a pucker contracted her brows.

"Ye've been drinking, Mike; 'an' ye promised me to lave the drink alone. That's why ye've stayed away. For shame!"

"Norah," he whispered, "Norah, mavourneen, go aisy now, go aisy. It's crazy I've been the past tin days wid that blatherin' lawyer—just crazy."

It's black ruin that he's workin' for me an' mine, an' if the boys had stood to me like men, we'd have our rights, but the blarney got away wid 'em, an' I'm left alone."

The deep dejection of his voice touched the girl. She timidly approached and laid a finger on his arm.

"Not alone, Mike," she whispered, with enchanting sweetness.

For answer the giant crushed her slender body against his mighty chest.

"Bless ye, darlint," he said fervently, "for thim words."

They exchanged a dozen simple phrases which brought the blood to Norah's cheeks, and a softer light into the fiery eyes of Mellish. He had avoided the O'Connors, resenting bitterly their defection to the arch-enemy; but now he forgot his wrongs, and sunned himself in the smiles and caresses of his mistress. She set before him some eggs, honey from the caves in the hills, and a sizzling rasher of home-cured bacon. Mike noted with silent approval the excellence of the bacon. Clever, capable hands, he reflected, were, after all, the right kind of dowry, but it was a pity that his Norah was an O'Connor.

"What will the boys do wid the money?" he asked suddenly.

"There's talk of the saloon business," she answered curtly.

"The devil's own thrade," said Mike, with his mouth full of honey and an uneasy remembrance of the good dollars he had left behind in San Lorenzo.

"Sure the money always wint that way," said Norah, bitterly.

"It'll be too late now to talk sinse to yure father, Norah."

"Ye might as well talk to the peak o' the Bishop, Mike."

Mellish pulled his short black pipe from his pocket, filled it, lighted it, and puffed away.

"Father Rochelle," he said at length, "has tould me to sell out. Rats lave a sinkin' ship, but Mike Mellish is no rat."

"Yure something of a mule, Mike."

"I am." And he smoked on.

CHAPTER II.

ILLUMINATION.

MRS. FISH lived upon a small estate, known as La Huerta, which lay just outside San Lorenzo, within a few yards of the road to Ireland. The house, an *adobe*, was encompassed by a small rose-garden, and a large vineyard, where the Rev. Abner had laboured not in vain for ten years. Within and without, the house bore the brand of honourable poverty. The primary colours of roof, walls, and shutters had long ago resolved themselves into neutral tints; the carpets, curtains, and books were mellowed by time and much use; but a glow still lingered upon the face of the ancient Spanish house, like the soft, almost girlish, flush upon the cheeks of its mistress; and intelligent strangers looked at this humble home with more than passing interest, impressed by its reposeful charm and the fragrance of the roses. An *emparado*, or arbour, led from the front door to the road, twelve feet wide, and as many yards long; and here, beneath the shade of wistaria, clematis, and jasmine, might be found during the greater portion

of the year the widow and her friends, sewing, gossiping, and scheming solemnly for the advancement and welfare of the Church.

The vineyard, leased on shares to an industrious Portuguese, produced annually some thirty to forty tons of Mission grapes. From these was expressed a rough but sound wine, with immense body and peculiar flavour, but well suited to the palates and purses of those who bought it. The vineyard, a few dozen fruit trees, and as many prolific hens, furnished the widow and her daughter Damaris with an income sufficient to maintain themselves and one serving-woman.

Damaris, it is true, played the church organ, a wretched instrument, in consideration of a tiny salary, and she gave music lessons, at fifty cents a lesson, to a select circle of children; but the dollars she thus earned Mrs. Fish refused to touch. Each month they were deposited in the county bank, where they drew six per cent. interest, compounded semi-annually; and it was whispered in San Lorenzo that this little nest-egg would hatch out one day into a modest trousseau, for San Lorenzo boasted but few American women, and 'twas not likely that such a pretty girl as Damaris Fish would remain long unwed.

Mrs. Skenk, one of the oldest residents, with a tongue that could outwag a terrier's tail, voiced the popular sentiment when she said in her nasal New England tones that "white men wa'n't a goin' to batch it unless they could help it, but that it did

seem as if none was quite good enough for Damaris Fish."

It has been said elsewhere that the name Skenk was a synonym for deportment, shell-work, piety, and the preserving of fruits. Abraham Skenk and the Rev. Abner Fish had crossed the grim river together, and now occupied adjoining lots in the Protestant cemetery, that pretty garden of sleep which nestles at the foot of the San Lorenzo mountain.

"Not till Abram's berial," Mrs. Skenk would say, "did I get reel well acquainted with Mis' Fish. She's a lady, a Christian, an' a stoodent, an' ther' ain't her equal in the land for puttin' up chow-chow. We'd walk to the ceme-tary together, Toosdays an' Fridays, an' she'd give me a plenty o' roses an' flowers to set on Abram's grave. The poor dear man couldn't smell onions, let alone roses, on account o' the azmy, but I never let Mis' Fish know that. It might ha' made her feel bad. Yes, she's an Episcopal, and I'm Presbyterian; but that don't make a mite o' difference. We're widders an' friends. My Alviry's the same age as Damaris. How's that? Miss Damaris don't favour her folks? No, I reckon not. She's dark, an' Mis' Fish's fair. But they're both pretty as peaches. I surmise that Mis' Fish was tol'ble unhappy with the minister. He was twenty years older than she, an' moony. Many a time I've watched him a stumblin' through the grass, when he might ha' used the path. He'd be a lookin' at the stars, an' gettin' his pants full o' stickers. Yes; Mis' Fish will merry again. She

ain't more'n forty, and looks thirty-five. As for Damaris, ther' ain't a livin' soul can say what that gurl'll do, or not do. She acts queer at times. If she hadn't been well raised she'd ha' been a handful; but her mother's daughter couldn't be anything but an angel nohow."

From this it may be inferred that the secret of Damaris's birth had remained inviolate. Upstairs, in her mother's bureau, lay the clouded cane and the intaglio ring that had encircled the finger of Otho Fabian; and in a battered dispatch-box were some papers relating to the patrimony he had squandered, and a printed form, signed by the Mother Superior of the Santa Clara Convent, setting forth that, on a certain date, the Rev. Abner Fish had removed from her care a female child. That was all. The girl believed herself to be the daughter of her guardians.

Upon the whitewashed wall at the foot of her bed hung the portrait of the parson. His calm, melancholy features looked out of a handsome violet velvet frame, not at all in keeping with its simple ascetic occupant. The frame had cost Damaris five hard-earned dollars! Extravagance—so said Mrs. Fish. When the Rev. Abner died the girl was fifteen years old, and since that day she had always prayed kneeling beneath the picture. To this shrine she carried all hopes and fears, and it seemed to her that the grave face above smiled in sweetest sympathy. For they had so much in common, she reflected, reading each other's thoughts before they

found utterance. Could death sever such ties? Surely not. Unknown to herself, a certain resentment smouldered in her breast against the wife who had accepted the loss of this saint with an amiable resignation that savoured of either heartlessness or intellectual weakness. Already she knew that an anæmic brain stirs but sluggishly the sensibilities; that it confronts alike joy and sorrow apathetically; that it scorns heroics, unable to apprehend their significance. To this mere child, love for the dead father and friend became a cult, a lamp to be trimmed in secret, too sacred to be shown to the vulgar, burning night and day with purer and brighter beams. A mercurial temperament, intense sympathy, and a keen sense of humour had constrained the girl to laugh hysterically upon the very day of the funeral—an impropriety severely condemned by the widow—and Damaris, contrasting her passionate revolt against Death with her mother's smug submission, laughed again, immoderately and bitterly.

After the funeral it leaked out that the worldly affairs of the Rev. Abner had been left in a most grievous tangle. Under the terms of an holographic will, all property, real and personal, was bequeathed unconditionally to the widow. These were shares in the county bank, some town lots, a one-eighth interest in a flour mill, two royalties upon books he had published, and *La Huerta*, mortgaged to the hilt! Mrs. Fish's friends held that *La Huerta* must be sold under the hammer, but William

Chillingworth thought otherwise. Thanks to his skill and energy the home was preserved intact; the other property cancelled the mortgage.

As time passed, Mrs. Fish walked less often to the cemetery. A year later, when the estate was settled, she erected a handsome marble monument to the memory of her husband. This duty performed, the visits ceased altogether.

"Repinin' 's vain," said Mrs. Skenk, upon the afternoon succeeding the events detailed in the last chapter, "an' after doo time the mourners must go about the streets. Yesterday, Mis' Fish was pricin' silk goods with me in Ikey Rosenbaum's store, an' ther' wa'n't nothin' to please her. She's thinkin' o' merridge; an' so's Mr. Chillin'worth."

"He is," said her eldest daughter Alvira, who sat sewing diligently. "What little time he can spare from thinkin' o' business, he gives to Damaris."

Mrs. Skenk gasped, and laid down her patchwork quilt.

"Alviry Skenk! You'd ought to be ashamed of yourself. Good land o' Peter! the mention o' sech a thing makes me feel faint to my stomach. Why, it's ondecent. Don't let me hear no such fullishness."

"It ain't fullishness."

"Alviry Skenk!"

"I say it ain't. Why should William Chillingworth marry a woman past forty—five years older than himself?"

"Mis' Fish is pinin' for him."

Alvira sewed on in pregnant silence.

"Why don't you say somethin'?" snapped her mother.

"Well, I'll say this. Damaris Fish is not the gurl to marry a boy o' twenty-five. She set away childish things when the old gen'l'man died, an' afore that, I reckon. She'd sooner sit up an' read poetry than go to a *cascarons* party. She's the best an' cleverest gurl in this town; and she thinks Will Chillingworth the best an' cleverest man—which he ain't."

Mrs. Skenk could hardly credit her ears. This authoritative statement from her own daughter paralysed fingers and tongue.

"He's brainy," continued Alvira, sewing rapidly, "but he's not good. He's a church member, but he sets in his pew worshippin' himself."

"Alviry Skenk, you lay that sewin' right down, an' tell me what you mean by sech ter'ble talk."

Alvira folded her work and replied calmly, "I know it's so. Would a real good man be turnin' them mis'able Irish out o' their little homes?"

"It's awful hard," admitted Mrs. Skenk; "but, Alviry, they're Catholics, an' the law is against 'em. Mr. Chillin'worth is actin' in accordance with the law, whose servant he is. It ain't no kind o' use for them poor things to plead ignorance o' the law. That's playin' the baby act."

"But there is a higher law," said the girl, rising—"Christ's law! An' the day'll come when we can't plead ignorance o' that. Mr. Chillingworth is workin' for a rich man, an' some day he'll be rich

himself, but he'll have to answer to God Almighty for them homeless women an' childern. But Damaris an' Mis' Fish think that he's first cousin to the angel Gabriel. Both of 'em worship the very plates he eats off. Day after day he's been a sittin' with 'em, an' gassin'. He's 'most made up his mind to pick an' choose, an' he's goin' to choose Damaris. He loves her, and I know it."

To her mother's amazement this self-contained young person flung her work on to the carpet and left the room. Mrs. Skenk shook her head more than once, and rubbed diligently the bright lenses of her spectacles, as if that would clear her befogged mental vision.

"Mercy sakes!" she murmured. "Gurls never talked that a way in my time. I dun'no what the world's a-comin' to. The end must be very near! P'r'aps now I made a mistake in takin' Mr. Chillin'worth as a boarder. But it ain't possible that Alviry would think o' him as a husband. Samanthy might be so fullish, but not Alviry. She's too like me."

The Skenks were temperance people, but on certain occasions of mental rather than physical infirmity relief was sought from a jar of ginger cordial. To this stimulant the mother of Alvira now betook herself.

Her daughter's indictment of William Chillingworth clashed directly with her own well-sifted opinion of the lawyer. Mrs. Skenk applied to the men and women with whom she came in contact

certain tests which she had reason to believe infallible. Her quick wit had apprehended the dangers which threatened young persons living in a new and unsettled country like Southern California—the scepticism, the easy code of ethics, the enervating climatic influences, and the tendency to the abuse of strong drink. The fact that Chillingworth was neither a sceptic, a loose liver, nor a drunkard, distinguished him at once from the common herd. With her hard New England common sense she not unnaturally set a somewhat extravagant value upon his positive qualities, his energy, shrewdness, and executive ability. And his clean-cut handsome face and sturdy figure appealed strongly to a woman, who, like most of her sex, held that a noble face was the sure index of a noble soul.

She eyed her patchwork quilt with disdain as it lay upon the table. "Yes," she muttered, "that's life—jest patchwork. The odds an' ends sewed together nohow! I mind that ther' piece o' brocade. It come from a three hundred dollar gown that belonged to Senator Belmont's wife. Her maid give it to me twenty years ago; an' now it's snug up against a bit o' my old figured merino waist that I bought when I merried Abram. Ther's wear in brocade, if it's handled careful, but it's most too fine to set alongside o' woollen goods. I surmise Alviry's right about William Chillin'worth. I'll slip on my bonnet an' step over to see Mis' Fish. Mercy me, she'll be disappointed, an' ther' may be trouble!"

At the gate of La Huerta she met Damaris.

"You're lookin' well," she said, noting the sparkle in the girl's eyes with misgiving. "Is Mis' Fish to home? Yes. Then I'll go right in. Mr. Chillingworth ain't returned?"

Damaris blushed beneath the keenest grey eyes in San Lorenzo.

"No," she answered quietly; "he has not. Mrs. Skenk, you—you know these people. You have lived here so long. Is there—is there any danger of his being *murdered*?"

She brought out the grimmest word in the English language with a gasp. Mrs. Skenk did not reply immediately.

"He has been so kind to us," she faltered; "and if he should be killed doing his duty—sorely against his will, too—it—it would be terrible, wouldn't it?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Skenk, softly, "you needn't to worry. You needn't to worry about William Chillingworth. It's written on his face that he's a goin' to make his mark. Sech men can't be spared, nohow. He's one of the builders o' this beautiful state. He may not know it, but he is. He's climbin' the ladder where the rungs air only rotten at the bottom. He'll get, you mark me, to the top. Goin' for a walk? Oh, indeed! To the mountain. Well, you'll get a view o' Ireland. It won't be Ireland long, I guess. Good-bye."

She turned in at the gate, and was lost to view in the *emparado*.

Damaris stepped briskly from the county road on to the smooth turf of the mountain. No dame of quality walked with greater grace than she, but the vigour of the peasant was hers also. As she breasted the steep hill the blood tingled in her veins.

Half way to the summit she paused. A broad stone, beneath a live oak, invited her to sit down. Then she suddenly remembered that she had not climbed the mountain since her father's death.

The last time she had sat upon this stone the Rev. Abner had sat beside her. He had complained whimsically of his increasing infirmities, and she had entreated him to forbear. Then he had taken her hand in his and spoken soberly of the future. She could recall the very words he had used.

"This short journey," he had said, pointing to the house which seemed barely a stone's throw distant, "has distressed me. I don't try to conceal from you, Damaris, what concerns both of us. I shall climb no more hills; and soon, my dearest, I must leave you. You are brave. Let us speak quietly of what must come to pass. When I am gone you will have lost your crutches. You will stand alone. Your—your mother will not be able to bear your burdens; her own may not press heavily upon her, for she is weak. You, Damaris, are strong. It is the strong who bear the burdens of the weak. If—if I could give you, my child, some true knowledge of what lies before you, I could go hence gladly, but I can only warn you. Most people count me a failure—a star-gazer. It is quite

true. I have tried to look up, and I look up still, and shall to the end. That is why I've stumbled. Damaris, there are three types of men living to-day in California—those who dwell upon the mountains, those who inhabit the plains, and those upon the seashore. The best live nearest to the stars. They have much to overcome—cold, a rocky sterile soil, and remoteness from market. But they are the salt of the earth, and it has always been so, since Abraham chose the hill land and gave Lot the plain. I must speak openly to you, my child. You have much good in you, and, alas! evil. You are a child of the west—like your own state. The golden age of childhood is passing from you, and the age of iron follows. How will it be with you, Damaris? A man can live where he pleases—in the mountains or in the plains—but a woman must live with her husband. I pray that you may marry a good man.'

A good man! Damaris repeated the words as she gazed across the green hills of Ireland. A good man!—Did she know many good men? No. So far she had met but one—the dead parson. Of his goodness she had no doubt whatever. In this matter she was fortunate. There must be a standard, a unit of value, by which we may measure ourselves and others. To many this standard is of indefinite size—it varies inversely according to the square of experience. The large and complex experience demands an elastic, almost invisible rule, *tout savoir c'est pardonner*, a comfortable reflection when applied to omniscience and eternal punishment.

Damaris, of course, had no experience; she was quite satisfied with her yard stick. Using this humble measure, she had found good men conspicuously absent. The girl was innocent, but not ignorant. She could recognize sin because she met the hussy daily. The old mission town had an unsavoury reputation even in California. Vice, driven from healthier communities by the Vigilantes, rotted at ease in San Lorenzo.

A sense of impending mischief fluttered her reflections. Thrice she glanced round, as if conscious of a malign presence. According to the parson, who held heterodox views, the spirits of the departed are constrained to linger upon earth, silent witnesses of actions for which they are accountable. This theory of an intermediate state was familiar to Damaris and approved by her. Mrs. Fish denounced it as wicked, impious, and silly.

Presently her face brightened. In the far distance, upon the road to Ireland, appeared a horseman. It was impossible for human eyes to recognize William Chillingworth, but instinct told Damaris that it was he. In less than five minutes doubt became a certainty. The lawyer sang as he rode, and the mellow notes floated upwards, and vibrated in the heart of the listener. She reflected proudly that no man save Chillingworth would ride alone, and possibly unarmed, through a country bristling with lawless and evicted squatters. It would be pleasant to shake his hand and hear the facts from his own lips. In her hand she carried a white

sunshade furred. If she opened it, advanced a couple of paces, and waved it, he would come to her.

She hesitated. An indefinable languor seemed to paralyze action, but heighten sensation. Past, present, and future glided before her—a carnival of phantoms. With an effort she rose to her feet, and opened the parasol!

When he stood beside her she wondered at her fears. He was sunburned, and his rough clothes were stained by the red soil of Ireland. He caught the glance and laughed.

“It looks like blood, doesn’t it? It’s only mother earth; and I feel a regular son of the soil. Well, no blood has been shed, thank God! And I’ve been successful beyond my wildest hopes. With the exception of Mellish, and a couple of others who cut no figure, the squatters have consented to waive their claims. Sausages and palaver did it.”

He tied his horse, and led her to the stone.

“How pleasant this is!” he said simply.

His animal magnetism held her spellbound. Mrs. Skenk’s words flitted across her memory. Truly this man was destined to make his mark.

“Tell me about the squatters,” she murmured.

“If you could have seen the squalor of their cabins, you would not feel so sorry for them. In fifteen years they have done—nothing. It is the climate, and the example of the greasers. I found the San Julian a regular paradise; but these people have planted neither flower nor fruit tree. I have

not seen a rose, not a single rose, from the time I rode out with Cassidy till now."

He glanced at the rose in her bosom, and said in a softer voice—

"Damaris, will you give me that rose?"

She gave it to him in silence. He took a pocket-book from his coat, placed the flower carefully within the folds of a paper, and continued—

"There is a supreme law underlying life, the law of progress. These wretched Irish have repudiated that law, and they must take the consequences."

"And those consequences, Mr. Chillingworth?"

He shrugged his broad shoulders.

"They say"—she shivered—"that some of them will starve."

"It's not easy to starve in California. They will make room for a better class of settlers. These lands will be surveyed, subdivided, and placed upon the market. With increased railroad facilities, we may hope to see Americans, thrifty, energetic, enterprising farmers, amongst us before the year is out. They will plant orchards and vineyards, and their success will attract others. The dawn of prosperity is at hand. The old order, rotten to the core, must give place to the new. My firm belief in this has kept me in San Lorenzo. That—and one other consideration."

"But if the land was really theirs. If del Pliego's title——"

"The President has set his seal upon it now. From Washington there is no appeal."

"Except," she added timidly, "to God!"

"Ay," he answered gravely, "God can reverse the judgments of even presidents; and if"—his glance wandered across the lovely landscape—"if a blight should linger upon Ireland, if a curse should wither the lives of those, and you may count me amongst them who have driven this rabble from our midst, then, and not till then, will I bow my head to the decree of the Supreme Court. But those who are coming will not fail. Look at those foothills. What a glorious heritage for the strong!"

They gazed in silence at the enchanting scene. A golden haze quivered upon the valley beneath, blotting out the few pitiful works of man—the houses, fences, and barns—so-called improvements!—and manifesting in all their splendour the monuments of the Master. The sun was sinking behind the peaks, which stood bold out, purple against a saffron sky. High in the heavens a pair of buzzards floated to and fro upon motionless pinions.

"The man," said Chillingworth, "who can explain the mystery of that flight will make a practical flying machine, and a fortune."

"Detestable birds!" replied Damaris. "Always waiting and watching for death. It grows cold. Let us go home."

"Not yet," replied Chillingworth. "I have something to say to you. I have waited long enough, but the time has come. To-day I am justified in asking you to share my life. Damaris, when I want

anything, I ask for it in plain words. Give me yourself."

He spoke firmly, with the simplicity of supreme art, but his voice faltered at the close of the sentence. The girl was no brainless flirt. Her acceptance was as free from puling affectation as the proposal.

"I wish," said she, putting her hands into his, "that there was more to give."

Half an hour later they descended the mountain, with the glory of the sunset upon their faces. When Chillingworth mounted his horse, his future wife laid her hand upon the animal's mane.

"Tell me," she said, nervously twisting a lock of hair, "are you—are you a good man?"

He kissed her tender face with a passion that bewildered her.

"A good man?" he repeated. "Why, Damaris, what a very leading question! All goodness is relative and comparative."

"Are you a good man?" she repeated, gazing with strange intensity into his smiling eyes.

"You shall have your answer, my sweet Damaris. Promise me that it will make no difference."

"It will make no difference," she repeated gravely.

"Then I'll whisper it. Into your little ear—so. Am I a good man? No, I am not!"

Mrs. Fish met Damaris in the *emparado*, from whose leafy shelter she had seen, herself unseen, Chillingworth gallop past. A glance at the girl's expressive face set at rest any doubts she may have

entertained as to the propriety of Mrs. Skenk's admonitions. Love's seal is not to be mistaken by a jealous woman. Not till supper was over, however, did she ask the question that burned upon the tip of her tongue. Mrs. Fish held certain exasperating dogmas upon the subject of time. To these she was fettered by custom and convenience—a slave who hugged her chains, and proclaimed loudly her bondage. It was known in San Lorenzo that this exemplary lady rose at half-past six, that she performed excellently well certain definite duties at certain definite hours, and went to bed punctually at nine. At some English public schools boys are birched before breakfast—a most commendable practice, as it gives an appetite to both flogger and flogged. Mrs. Fish had always slapped Damaris between seven and eight, after supper. Trivial offences were carefully noted during the day, and summarily punished at the proper season, the hour when the Rev. Abner was abroad. As a child, Damaris believed that her father, in his great tenderness of heart, left the house on purpose, and loved him the more; but one evening he returned unexpectedly and witnessed a sharp box on the ear. Damaris was fourteen years old, and tall for her age. The Rev. Abner spoke privately to his wife, and from that hour the indignity of corporal punishment ceased, but the scoldings and lectures continued.

The parlour was the place where Mrs. Fish dispensed what she called justice. In ancient days the room had been used as a *sala*. The polished floor

had reflected the shimmering splendours of *rebosos* and *calzoneros*; the wainscot had re-echoed to the joyous strains of *fandango* and *bolero*; the deep window-seats had concealed lovers from the eyes of *dueñas*, and still subtly suggested the romance of California's golden age. At the northern end was a vast fireplace, and here in the gloaming, when the good live-oak logs were glowing, it had been the habit of the parson to weave the most delightful stories of early Spanish days. Sitting in his big chair, with Damaris upon his knee, he would talk for one enchanted hour of Junipero Serra and his devoted Franciscans, of the gallant Castro, of Alvarado, Vallejo, de la Guerra, and others of high degree. Rubbishy tales, according to Mrs. Fish, but fraught with deepest significance to Damaris, as illustrating what she considered the cardinal virtues, truth, valour, loyalty, and honour. When she could no longer with propriety sit upon the parson's knee, the girl occupied a stool at his feet, and followed her father's fancy wherever it led him, often into the strangest places; for the Rev. Abner was a sentimental traveller, who obeyed the dictates of heart rather than head, and who wandered inconsequently from palace to hovel, equally at home in the house of the Cæsars and the kennel of Diogenes.

To Damaris, therefore, the parlour was eloquent of what was pleasant and unpleasant in her short life. The dun-coloured hour from seven to eight balanced the rosy minutes between five and six.

It was simply furnished. The parson's modest

library filled three low book-cases; a square piano stood at the south end, opposite the fireplace; there were a dozen chairs, two or three tables, one cabinet containing butterflies, another filled with Indian relics—arrow-heads, *ollas*, and beads; and upon the walls hung a few engravings and mezzotints.

"Mr. Chillingworth has returned?" said Mrs. Fish, sitting judiciously upright in the stiff-backed chair she habitually used. A soft flush coloured her round cheeks, and her eyes sparkled.

"Yes," replied Damaris.

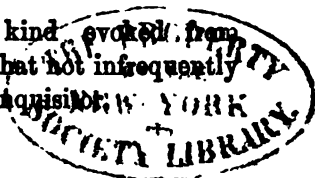
During supper she had been oppressed with the sense that something disagreeable impended; that her wonderful piece of news would not provoke the sympathy that a daughter might expect from a mother; nay, further, she divined with amazing intuition that it would give positive offence. The meal had been eaten in silence. Of late—especially at supper—conversation between Mrs. Fish and Damaris had languished. The passionate, imaginative nature of the girl craved richer food than a warmed-up dish of gossip, a monologue upon sweet pickles, or vague speculations as to the price of Mrs. Dr. Lowly's Easter bonnet.

"You have seen him?" continued Mrs. Fish, sharply.

"Yes."

"What did he say to you?"

Cross-examination of this kind evoked from Damaris a directness of reply that not infrequently staggered and confounded the inquisitor.



"He asked me to be his wife," said Damaris, shyly. "And, mother, I—I said, yes."

She rose from her chair and came forward with extended hands, her face aglow with love and tenderness. Mrs. Fish rose also, and recoiled.

"You dared to say yes?"

"Dared? I don't understand."

"I have taken a serpent into my bosom," said Mrs. Fish, with dramatic emphasis, "and it has stung me."

Then the storm of her indignation broke, raising a dust even from the well-swept carpet, blinding the eyes of the girl who listened speechless to this tornado of words, and blistering her heart. A woman in a temper is too commonplace an object to describe. Mrs. Fish ran the usual gamut of foot-stamping, invective, and tears.

"You have taken from me," she sobbed in conclusion, "the only man I ever loved."

"What!" said Damaris, finding at last one word.

"Yes, it is true. Mr. Fish and I were ill-mated. He was too old for me, and his wits were for ever wool-gathering. The dear Lord knows I tried to do my duty to him. If I do say it, there isn't a better housekeeper in San Lorenzo; and he needed as much looking after as a child. And I've done my duty by you. Mr. Fish did his best to spoil you, telling you things that he kept from his own wife, and spending his dollars on pianos and an 'Encyclopædia Britannica,' just to humour *you*. And I stood

it all without a word ; and now, this is my reward ! Oh dear ! oh dear ! ”

She flung herself upon the ancient sofa, and bewailed her unhappy lot ; physically and mentally she was limp as a dish-clout.

“ You never loved my father ? ” repeated Damaris, in horror. She had borne in silence the brunt of her mother’s anger, her accusations of cunning, falsehood, and intrigue, but any belittling of the saint was intolerable. “ You never loved the best and kindest man that ever lived ! I can’t believe it ! ”

Mrs. Fish, face down among the sofa cushions, made no reply. Then Damaris recalled what the parson had said about the strong bearing the burdens of the weak. This pitiful, bedraggled figure quickened suddenly her sympathy. She hesitated a moment, and then laid her hand gently upon Mrs. Fish’s shoulder.

“ Mother,” she whispered, “ I am so sorry, so very sorry for you, but, indeed, I did not know that you cared for—for Mr. Chillingworth. He was here so often, in and out of the house, and I thought he came on business, and—and that your heart was with father. How blind I must have been ! ”

Mrs. Fish sat up, galvanized into coherent speech by the word “ blind.” The expression upon her face appalled Damaris.

“ Blind ! ” she repeated venomously ; “ yes. But you shall remain blind no longer. Don’t call me mother. I am not your mother. I never was your mother. Stay here, till I return.”

She hurried from the parlour, and Damaris, white-faced and trembling, fell upon her knees. Even in this moment of supreme distress she was conscious that the loss of such a mother was a gain; that the mystery of their conflicting sympathies and antipathies was at last explained; that the petty tyrannies, the injustice, and the chill affection so grudgingly bestowed, were adequately accounted for. No, Mrs. Fish was surely not her mother, but——

The horror of the question that followed smote her like a buffet in the face. She ran upstairs and confronted Mrs. Fish, in the act of unlocking the parson's desk.

"Tell me," she panted. "My father, your—your husband, was *my* father, *is* my father?"

Mrs. Fish paused. The strength and intensity of the question had an uncanny quality. The use of the past and present tense was pathetic, even to her meagre understanding. A husband, she dimly realized, might be replaced; but a father was, and is, and is to be.

"Mr. Fish adopted you," she answered slowly, "without my consent and against my advice. Your own parents died when you were two years old. Mr. Fish wished you never to know this, but he often disregarded my wishes, and I now see fit to disregard his."

Damaris ignored this self-justification. "You are a cruel woman," she said quietly. "I thank God that you are not my mother. Please tell me who I am?"

"Ask Mr. Chillingworth, you impertinent minx!"

"He knows?"

"Yes, I told him; and—and—— Good Heavens! that accounts for his treachery. He traded upon that knowledge. Damaris, he is a wicked man. Do you hear me? A wicked man! He has fooled me, and he is trying to fool you. He made up to me, because he thought that my widow's mite would advance his interests; but since he has been employed by Dennis Fabian, he thinks that he can do better by marrying the rich man's niece. Your father, Damaris, was Otho Fabian, the brother of Dennis. Do you understand? Do you see the importance of this? He is a wretch, a rascal! You cannot marry him. Swear that you will not marry him! Swear it, Damaris!"

Her shrill insistence affected the girl no more than the idle scream of a blue-jay.

"Who was my mother?" she asked coldly.

"I don't know. The brothers had quarrelled, and Dennis refused you the shelter of his house. I did not tell William Chillingworth *that*. Here is all that belongs to you—this ring, and these papers, and a cane."

Damaris took the ring, and glanced at it with interest.

"It is valuable," said Mrs. Fish, "very valuable, but Mr. Fish refused to sell it."

Damaris slipped it on to her third finger.

"I will take you to my heart again," said Mrs. Fish, flushing, "and forget what has passed, if—if

you will swear, now, to give up that false man. You owe me something, Damaris. You—why, you strange girl, you stare at me as if I were a rattlesnake !”

Damaris took the papers which lay upon the desk. “ Yes,” she said calmly, “ I am in your debt, but I shall not increase the indebtedness. To-morrow I leave your house; since my—since Mr. Fish died it has not seemed to me like home. You have accused me of most shameful things, of lying, intrigue, and the blackest ingratitude, but I said nothing because I dared not speak. Once I was warned against the evil that was in me, and I wondered what was meant. Now I know, and the knowledge frightens me.”

Her face was quite colourless, save where the dark eyes glowed beneath darker brows. As she continued, the florid complexion of the elder woman blanched also.

“ You talk of forgetting what has passed between us. How can that be? It’s impossible. You’ve cut in two what can never be made one again.”

“ But the scandal, Damaris? The Church?”

“ There need be no scandal. I can visit friends till—till I marry.”

Mrs. Fish collapsed. “ After what I have said, you will marry William Chillingworth?”

“ Upon your honour, did he ever ask you to become his wife?”

“ N—n—no.”

“ Neither by word, nor implication?”

“ N—no; but he is a rogue.”

"To-night," replied Damaris, bitterly, "you have taken from me a mother and a father. Now you would rob me of the man I love. It is too much. Don't speak. Don't follow me. I must be alone."

* * * * *

When she reached her room she lay down quietly upon the bed, and lay there motionless for a couple of hours. Mrs. Fish's daughter, under a similar mental strain, would possibly have sobbed herself into temporary imbecility. Analyzing her emotions, she was conscious of an irreparable loss, of an aching void that could never be filled. As a hoyden she had rejoiced in her paternity, believing that she was blessed beyond the average; that her half-interest, so to speak, in the parson's many fine qualities was a sacred trust and gift from God; and the parson, reading her heart as it were an illuminated missal, impressed upon this plastic intelligence the responsibilities of what he whimsically called a spiritual partnership. She reflected sadly that his death had not so wrung her soul as the knowledge that this partnership was physically speaking dissolved.

Presently she lifted a haggard face from the pillow and went to the window. It was nine o'clock. She flung wide open the old-fashioned casement, and looked forth. Masses of sea-fog obscured the face of the heavens, but here and there some sentinel of the innumerable host flashed across the darkness a friendly ray, and then disappeared. Damaris listened attentively for the voices of the

night—the frog-croakings from the marsh behind the mission, the murmur of the pines and pepper trees, the weird note of the big white owls. But a profound silence brooded upon the landscape. Nature seemed asleep, exhausted by the demands of importunate spring. Even the tremulous leaves of the eucalypti were at rest. She clasped her hands and prayed fervently.

“Come to me,” she sighed into the void; “come to me, father. I need you. Come.” She strained her ears for an answer—in vain. “Can it be possible,” she murmured, “that he does not hear me? Ah, no! My faith is not strong enough.” She prayed again with the strenuousness of necessity. Then she turned from the window and laughed. “Why should he come?” she said bitterly. “He is not my father.”

She lit her lamp, and began to undress, but a gleam upon her finger arrested attention. The intaglio was afire with green light. Damaris lifted her hand and looked curiously into the depths of the stone. It had the flaws common to all emeralds, but the colour was peculiarly intense and translucent. Upon the surface was carved with exquisite skill the head of a woman. With a stifled exclamation of amazement, the girl recognized a portrait of herself in profile—the chin, the brows, the nose, and curved lips were almost identically the same. The mystery of this strange likeness baffled her for more than a minute, then she smiled tenderly. Her quick wits had suggested a probable explanation.

Fabian, doubtless, had bought the ring, and refused to part with it because it resembled her own mother, whose straight, classic features she (Damaris) had inherited. The idea captivated her fancy, and, bending her head, she kissed the ring. The contact of the cool gem to her burning lips seemed to cool likewise her brain, and she kissed the stone a second time, and turned once more to the open window. Out there, in the shadow-land, were her father, her mother, and the parson. To these three persons she owed flesh and spirit, what was good and what was evil, and from them, henceforward, she could demand nothing; for she was now scornfully alive to the folly of invoking the spirits of the departed.

Before she got into bed, she gazed wistfully at the portrait of the Rev. Abner, but no prayers were said. Lying alone in the darkness, her thoughts turned from the dead to the living—to Chillingworth, her brave, handsome lover. She repeated the vows he had sworn, told the tale of his ardent kisses, and confessed herself happy before she slept. The tissue of the dream that followed presented a curious pattern. It was embroidered with demons and angels wrestling for the possession of a golden thread that ran gleaming through the warp and woof of the fabric. Then suddenly—so it seemed to her—she was summoned loudly by name. She became sensible immediately of an extraordinary mental exhilaration and illumination, an amazing ability to embrace in one panoramic view both past

and present. And with this a physical buoyancy, quite outside previous experience, as if she had flung aside an ill-fitting garment—her body. Flesh had dematerialized at the command of spirit.

Then again, as if from a vast distance, floated her name—

“Damaris!”

“I am here,” she answered, trembling. “Who calls me?”

“Your mother,” sighed the voice.

Her mother! The word thrilled her to the core. She awaited with impatience, tempered by exaltation, this message from the unknown. Excitement had banished fear.

“Your own mother.”

“Where are you?” she asked.

“I am here,” replied the voice; and the infinite sadness of mere tone brought tears to the eyes of the listener. “I am here, fettered after death, as in life, to what is vile and ignoble. Nor can I pass from hence till redeemed by you.”

“By me?” faltered Damaris.

“By you,” sighed the voice. “It is just. We— I and the desolate souls who bear me company—are constrained to harvest the seed we have sown. We are witnesses of the evil we have bequeathed to our own flesh and blood, of the evil which recoils upon our own heads. And the good that was in us, the divine essence that cannot be destroyed, has passed also from our keeping. Like the evil, it is with those with whom we lived on earth, the uncounted

thousands with whom we ate and drank and jested. It blooms in the most unlikely places, it withers, but it cannot die. That is our punishment—to see the triumph of evil over good.”

“But if the good triumphs over the evil?” said Damaris, eagerly.

“Then,” replied the voice, “we are released from this present bondage, and another chance is given us elsewhere. Ultimately the good must triumph, but that cannot be till billions of years have rolled by. And our release from this torment must come from the hands of others, who have learned to use what we abused.”

“Tell me what to do,” murmured Damaris.

“It may not be told,” murmured the voice, growing fainter. “You alone, you must steer your bark to safe harbourage or to the reefs. Nor may the quick hold converse with the dead. You invoked the dead with such faith that I was permitted this special grace. And there is another reason. You have that about you which was mine, and yet was not mine—the ring upon your right hand. It is an accursed thing. Arise, go to the window, and fling it from you. Farewell.”

The voice died away.

Damaris rested quietly till the dawn. As soon as she woke she felt for the ring.

It was gone!

CHAPTER III.

WILLIAM CHILLINGWORTH.

WILLIAM CHILLINGWORTH was born in the Nutmeg State, where his father, a country physician, had drowned a fine practice in whisky. Dr. Chillingworth became a confirmed sot before William was out of knickerbockers, nor was drunkenness his only vice; in antithesis, he possessed certain qualities—more highly esteemed, perhaps, in the west than in New England—to wit, a keen sense of humour, the gift of the gab, and the muscles of a prizefighter. The wife of this burly Bacchus bore him nine children, William being the youngest, five sons and four daughters, strong healthy children, with big bodies, big appetites, and big feet for ever making holes in their stockings. Thanks to the mother, who was a woman of infinite resources, with a positive genius for economy, the big appetites were satisfied, and the big feet properly shod. But the sense of failure soured an otherwise sweet and wholesome nature. Her poverty, which she kept out of sight, like a hair shirt, proved a constant source of irritation. And, it seems a trivial thing

to mention, she could never see the point of her husband's jokes. Indeed, it really afflicted her that he should joke at all. Sin and sorrow and shame, she considered, had for ever banished laughter. Her face, as the years passed, grew grey and grim. With a strain of Scotch blood in her veins, she sought and found scriptural authority to uphold the strict discipline she exercised over her children. When she realized, poor woman, that they turned from her to the sot who had disgraced them, she accepted the issue in pathetic silence; the hand of God, she reflected, was upon her, and repining was both wicked and vain.

In this home atmosphere of whisky fumes, profanity, economy, and biblical exegesis, William Chillingworth reached his fourteenth year. Then the war of secession convulsed the whole country, and William's four brothers marched to the front. Those who are old enough to remember those troublous times still talk of the wild excitement that raged from Maine to California—the speech-making, the talks in the market-place, the windy protestation of the few who skulked at home, and the fervent patriotism of the many who sacrificed health, fortune, and family to shoulder a musket in the ranks! There were dry throats in those days, and none drier than Dr. Chillingworth's. He had proffered his services as a surgeon to the Government, but they were courteously declined. A year later they would have been thankfully accepted. Then a fourth attack of delirium tremens followed,

and the stern-faced wife, who listened to his ravings, knew that the end was near. When he died there was enough money due from patients to bury him, not a cent more. Six weeks later William set sail for California.

On shipboard he made friends with passengers and crew. His handsome face, his high spirits, pluck, and shrewdness, were not to be denied. A San José lawyer, Reuben Oldfield, an illiterate manipulator of Spanish grants, and the owner of half a dozen trotting horses, took a fancy to the lad, and offered him a position as office-boy, and a small salary. Both were eagerly accepted. Oldfield was returning from Washington, where his efforts to patent some very questionable land titles had met with gratifying success. He was an old bachelor, and proposed that the boy should board and lodge with him.

"I'm willing to clap my brand on you," he said, in his dry slang. "The country's full o' jest such raw colts, and the most of 'em ain't worth stable room, let alone feed; but you shape well, and may turn out a winner. If I didn't think that I wouldn't fool with you, and don't you forget it. Now, mind, you've got to quit all foolishness, and trot square from the fall o' the flag. I shall work you out early and late, and there'll be no running round that Dago town San José. From what you tell me, you've got a thoroughbred for a dam and a bronco for a sire. You know what drunkenness spells—eh? Yes, that's right. Damnation here and hereafter.

And there's lots of it in the Garden City. You'll be sixteen next May, and the girls, good and bad, will soon be squinting at that curly head o' yours; but don't let me catch you a-lookin' at the hussies. If I do there'll be one word said—pack! It won't be all work with me. We'll play when we can't work. I like horse-racing, and fishing, and hunting. But you'll have to leave whisky and women alone."

With this gentleman Chillingworth passed ten fruitful years, and salted down, for life, much that was valuable and much that was not. He learned the letter and spirit of the law. He learned to throw a fly, break a horse, and shoot snipe. He learned to place business before pleasure, and he learned, unhappily, the doctrine of expediency. He drank nothing stronger than claret, and knew less than a poodle of women and their ways. His nose was held tight to the grindstone, and became in time so sharp that it could insinuate itself into business that many experts considered quite nose-proof.

Oldfield chuckled at his pupil's aptness, and began to throw out hints of a partnership—a small share in the profits. At this time he was paying William a hundred dollars a month, very much less than he was worth, as the young man knew, but he wisely held his peace, and asked for no increase of salary. What he earned, he spent on clothes, which cost many shekels on the Pacific Slope, and sport. He made no remittances to his mother, partly because she assured him she was in no need of money, and

partly because he admitted to himself no sense of obligation to a woman who was three thousand miles away. It must be remembered in his favour that he had received from this mother more spanks than kisses, more frowns than smiles. Oldfield—Uncle Reuben, as Chillingworth now called him—advised him to save at least half his salary. “A man never knows when he’ll break down,” said this Ulysses; “and, Billy, if you don’t save the cents you’ll never save the dollars. S’pose, now, that I gave you the sack. Where’d you be?”

Billy was of opinion that he could take care of himself, but Uncle Reuben shook his hoary head. “You’d only smart in streaks,” said he. “When a baby undertakes to squeeze a lemon, he’s apt to get more juice in his eye than in his mouth!”

Billy thought of the partnership, and laughed loudly at his patron’s wit. It would be fun, he reflected, to teach his mentor a lesson. If he could demonstrate to this cynic that a young fellow of twenty-five could squeeze lemons properly without advice or assistance, the articles of partnership might be prepared at once. He knew of a piece of land, lying in the heart of the town, that might be acquired for a mere song, if the buyer were content to waive a perfect title. Into this title Uncle Reuben and his pupil had poked their noses. They were satisfied that the claims of some minor heirs could be adjusted without much waste of time or money. Chillingworth had no reason to believe that the old gentleman had any intention whatsoever

of purchasing this debatable land ; but some weeks before a rich friend had hinted that if a "gilt-edged proposition" presented itself, he, the friend, would be prepared to furnish the funds to float it. To this friend Chillingworth now applied ; the property was duly bought in the friend's name, and the deed recorded. Our hero received a contract setting forth that, after the land had been subdivided into lots, sold, and the purchase price paid back, all profits were to be equally divided between the owner and himself.

The next day there was an explosion. Oldfield was furious. He had intended, so he told his clerk, to buy this property himself. At the lowest estimate he had expected to clear ten thousand dollars ; but the purchaser, whose soul and body he consigned to Satan, should not make a single cent. This he swore by all the gods, and Chillingworth knew that he could keep his word. If he had been wise he would have confessed and demanded absolution on the score of ignorance, but Oldfield's volcanic rage confounded his judgment. He temporized, and lost an opportunity that might have been grasped and turned to account. If he had offered Oldfield his own profits, he might have been pardoned. Unhappily for Chillingworth, his friend betrayed him.

"You're not worth the powder to blow you up!" said Uncle Reuben, when this double-dealing came to light. "You've made use of information acquired while in my employ ; you've sucked my brains, you miserable jackanapes ! Get out of my

office! And skip the town. By God! I'll make it too hot to hold you."

The young man was not lacking in spirit. "Hold on," he said. "No names, please, or somebody will get hurt. I'm not going to make any excuses. I will leave this office, but I can't leave the town. My interests, you know, won't permit that. I've just five thousand dollars at stake. Good morning."

Prave 'orts! unjustified by time. Oldfield was not to be outcrowded upon his own dunghill. He manipulated the minor heirs to such purpose that the title to the Chillingworth town lots, as they came to be called, was pronounced in open court invalid. The surveyor, a friend of Oldfield's, sued our hero for the amount of his bill. It was paid, but Chillingworth, as a business man, was killed. He had wit enough to know that he was dead, and to arrange that his funeral should be as inconspicuous as possible. Three months later he hung up his "shingle" in San Lorenzo. There he confronted competition, poverty, and slander with such patience and geniality that, five years later, he was elected district attorney, and served his term honourably and efficiently. He had become a leading citizen, a church member, and a social power, but his poverty pressed him cruelly. As district attorney he was debarred from much lucrative practice. He did not, therefore, present himself for re-election, and was rewarded by obtaining the management of the San Julian grant, and

the confidence of Dennis Fabian. At last, he told himself, he stood on velvet.

Now he was engaged to be married to the girl he loved.

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It was characteristic of the lawyer that as soon as he had reached his lodgings, changed his clothes, and eaten supper, he wrote a long, lucid letter to his patron. The letter consumed two hours that might have been spent far more agreeably with Damaris, but Chillingworth despised procrastination. He had learned one lesson from Oldfield very thoroughly, that the interest of the employé must always curtsy to the convenience of the employer. When the letter was sealed and stamped, he lit a cigar and strolled uptown. He had something of importance to say to Cassidy, who had bachelor quarters in the County Court House, and, as sheriff, charge of the gaol in the basement, known to the wags as the Hotel Cassidy.

The sheriff, however, was not in his office, but his deputy, Tom Mudgit, who afterwards held the shrievalty for three consecutive terms, welcomed the lawyer genially. He respected Chillingworth as an attorney, and liked him as a man. Both liking and respect were returned.

"What's the good word?" said Tom.

"I filled their stomachs with sausages and their heads with sound sense," replied Chillingworth. "But we may have trouble with Mellish. I've dropped in to see Steve about it."

"He'll be back directly, Mr. Chillingworth."

"I should like to help the fool, Tom, but he won't be helped."

"Ye kin help that kind o' blamed idiot," remarked Mr. Mudgit, "with a club, an' nothin' else. But it's kind o' hard on the hull outfit."

"Yes," replied the lawyer.

"As for Mellish," continued the deputy sheriff, "he's bin in town talkin' through his hat. He's a-goin' to kill all of us, he says, before he quits."

"Or be killed himself," said Chillingworth.

"Jest so," consented Mr. Mudgit; "but I'd hate to make a widder o' pretty Norah. I'm a liar if that gurl ain't a daisy. Ther's bin better lookin' men than Mike Mellish a-hangin' around the O'Connor cabin, but she's sot on the giant."

"I have heard of the girl," murmured Chillingworth. "She's a branch of a rotten tree, Tom. Those O'Connors are drunken vagabonds."

"Mr. Chillingworth," said Tom, anxiously, "ye pack a gun these times, don't ye?"

"No," replied the lawyer, smiling; "I've never carried a pistol. I can use one, too. But a six-shooter, Tom, wears holes in one's pants. I don't even own one."

He leaned back in his chair; and Tom reflected that the broad chest presented an easy target.

"Say, now," he began, "ther's no sense in bein' reckless. Yer takin' big chances, Mr. Chillingworth." He rose from his chair and opened a drawer in the desk to the right of him. From this he

pulled out a small Smith and Wesson revolver. "Ye've bin awful good to me, Mr. Chillingworth," continued the deputy sheriff. "Ye got me this billet, I know, an' I'm not ongrateful. It'd make me feel fine if ye'd take this yere toy an' keep it handy, in case o' trouble. I've got no use for it myself, havin' other guns that air bigger than you'd care ter pack. Will ye take it, as a gift from yours truly?"

Chillingworth eyed the small weapon with a frown, but the frown melted at the sight of Mudgit's anxiety.

"You're a good fellow, Tom. Yes; I'll accept the pistol with many thanks, and I'll keep it handy, till this fire-eater Mellish is out of Ireland. But, nine times out of ten, it's a mistake to carry a dangerous weapon. A man might be tempted to use it, and regret it ever afterwards."

They chatted for half an hour upon indifferent topics. Then the sheriff joined them. His sullen face was twisted with fear and anger.

"What's the matter?" he growled. "I'll tell ye. The town is bein' painted blood-red with the dollars you've given these squatters."

He turned to Chillingworth, whose calm face annoyed him. The sheriff was slightly the worse for liquor.

"Ye take this too easy," he blurted out. "There's going to be blazes to pay in this town unless——"

"Yes, unless——?"

"Unless we fix Mellish."

"I've come here at this late hour, Cassidy, to talk this over with you—*quietly*."

"Give me instructions to turn the son of a gun off his land," exclaimed Cassidy, smiting the counter with his heavy fist, "an' Tom an' me, an' mebbee a couple more to make sure, will teach Mike Mellish a lesson that'll last him for life."

A grim silence followed this statement.

"If he showed fight, Cassidy?"

"I'd shoot him as I would a dog."

"Ay, that would please Mr. Fabian. You remember his instructions?"

"Curse it! you've tried soft soap. Give him a dose of lead."

Chillingworth glanced at Tom Mudgit, who turned his honest face aside. Popular sentiment, even in the sheriff's office, was set dead against actual violence. If Mellish were killed, the whole state, from Mount Shasta to San Diego, would condemn Fabian and his tools.

"No," said the lawyer, with emphasis. "We must be patient, Steve. I'll see Mellish again, and use some more soap. Soap," he added reflectively, "is the great civilizer. The progress of the world has been due largely to—soap. Lead, my dear friend, has weighed it down. You ought to use more soap, Cassidy."

Honest Tom burst out laughing. The sheriff's dirty face and still dirtier hands emphasized Chillingworth's advice. Cassidy scowled. The lawyer, sorry that he had jested upon facts, turned the

subject by reciting his adventures in Ireland. Both men were keenly interested, and listened attentively.

"Jee—roo—salem!" exclaimed Mr. Mudgit, "I couldn't ha' believed that one man'd have the nerve to lie down fer ten days with that crowd o' coyotes."

"I had Anton with me, Tom. Really, I took no risks. Well, good night. I'll see Mellish to-morrow afternoon."

When he was out of earshot, Mudgit turned to his chief.

"Ain't he a daisy?" he cried enthusiastically. "Ain't he a peach? Brave! Why that feller'd light his cigyar in an earthquake, an' make himself to home on a keg o' nitro-glycerine."

"He's nervy," admitted the sheriff, "but he's a fool, too. Doggone it! if he wants to monkey with the wrong end of a mule, it ain't none o' my business!"

* * * * *

Chillingworth did not return immediately to his lodgings. He knew that lawless men were abroad, and his thoughts turned instinctively to the two defenceless women sleeping at La Huerta. He determined to patrol the road to Ireland before going to bed. His brain was too heated for sleep, and the cool night air would refresh him and scatter the cobwebs of speculation. In his present mood he could not but consider Norah. What would be the condition of his own dainty Damaris if he were shot down? No, no, soap would surely prevail. On the morrow he would spend the morning with

his dear little woman, and perhaps filch from her some spell wherewith to charm this wild beast. He would see Norah, too, and love would triumph over hate.

When he reached the *adobe* all was quiet; but he walked up and down the road, reviewing the past, and scheming for the future. The man was saturated with the idea, the national idea, of money getting. He was at last equipped for the struggle in armour of his own forging. No rivets were loose. How well he had sharpened that trenchant blade, his tongue! Deprived of a college education, he had resolutely set himself to supply the loss of it. He had practised phrasemaking upon the groundlings. He had corrected a slipshod habit of speech, mended his grammar, and whittled down a somewhat Doric pronunciation. He smiled when he recalled how much he had learned from Damaris. He used to say "stodent" instead of "student," "deepo" for "dépôt," "was" when "were" should have been used, and other provincialisms. Yes; he owed much to the Fishes. For the parson, it is true, and his rambling habits of mind and body, he had scant respect. From a practical point of view it seemed a criminal waste of time and tissue that a man should wander up hill and down dale in search of some rare botanical specimen; and the Rev. Abner's spiritual vagaries he had always regarded as evidence of intellectual weakness, and distinctly unprofessional. To the man's refinement he lifted his hat. Then there was Mrs. Fish. A good type. An

excellent woman. Not too clever, but practical, who had worn becoming weeds, and was not above basting a turkey properly.

That this capable housewife, at least five years older than himself, should have set her cap at *him*, never entered his head. He had accepted her attentions, eaten the dishes set before him—the chicken salad, the ice cream, and the famous pickles—in happy ignorance of the tempestuous ardours he had inspired. If he had infused into his expressions of gratitude a warmth that was perhaps unnecessary, none who knew him need be surprised. Such matters were a question of temperament. Men with auburn-coloured curly hair, bright blue eyes, and clear skins are not to be held responsible for every idle compliment. Extraordinary as such a statement may seem, William Chillingworth's heart had never been touched until he met Damaris. And he capitulated at once, although the child was then just eight years old. Her physical beauty, her refinements of speech and dress, her precocious intellect, and enchanting sympathy filled him with delight. Not for many years had he considered seriously the question of making her his wife. He was absurdly ignorant of the sex, but held strong views on matrimony. Like all Americans worth their salt, he was not prepared to marry till he could give the wife of his choice what he believed to be every woman's due—good clothes, a comfortable house, and plenty of small change.

As he paced briskly to and fro, the future

presented an alluring perspective, with an eight-roomed cottage in the immediate foreground, and the towers of a palace at the end of the vista. The reader may smile contemptuously at this vaulting ambition, but it must be remembered that California, the El Dorado of America, is a country of magnificent distances. Every mother thinks that her son will ruffle it in the White House, or at least be governor of his native state. I believe it is a fact that no president has come from the Pacific Slope, but that is quite irrelevant.

At midnight Chillingworth went to bed and slept soundly till seven. Two hours later he was alone with Damaris.

"You don't look very well," he said, noting the dark circles round her eyes. "Have you told your mother?"

"Yes; I have told her."

"And what does she say?" he asked cheerily.

The girl flushed. A lie does not come pat to such lips as hers; but Mrs. Fish had entreated her to silence. The widow had reflected, during the watches of the night, that she was likely to furnish much entertainment to the San Lorenzo gossips, if the shameful truth leaked out. She had writhed upon her bed at the mere thought of the sorry figure she would cut—even when draped in the best black silk—at church socials, and the weekly meetings of the Dorcas Society! If the facts came to the ears of Mrs. Skenk, for instance, she might as well leave the town as brave the uplifted eyebrows

of her many friends and unfriends. Mrs. Skenk already knew far too much. Her visit of the previous day had been fraught with most mortifying significance. She had talked, it is true, of Damaris, but beneath her flow of congratulations boiled an undercurrent of inquisitiveness that had nearly swept the jealous widow into an avowal of her feelings. She had escaped with the mere rags of self-respect. Tossing about in the small hours of the morning, she had decided to appeal to the pride and generosity of the girl she had so bitterly abused. And the appeal was not made in vain. Damaris consented to remain with Mrs. Fish until she became Chillingworth's wife; and the secret of her birth was not to be divulged, at least for the present.

"Well," repeated the lawyer, "what does your mother say? I see your blushes, you little fairy, but you need not spare mine. I'm a prime favourite of Mrs. Fish, and I suppose she guessed long ago what was in my heart. Tell me—what did she say?"

"You have an imagination, sir. I leave you to guess. Oh, Will, what does it matter what she said? I learned last night that—that Mr. Fish was not my father."

Chillingworth kissed away the tears that stood in her eyes.

"I have known that for some time, Damaris; but you must not grieve, my dearest. I'm sorry, very sorry, that you should have been told this the day

we became engaged. No doubt your mother acted according to her lights, but she might have waited."

"How long have you loved me?" she asked inconsequently.

They were standing on the faded hearthrug in front of the big fireplace. Upon the mantelshelf was a photograph of Damaris at nine years of age. Chillingworth pointed at it and laughed.

"I've loved you for ten years. It's a solemn, solid fact. You know, Damaris, that Uncle Reuben was a woman-hater. Perhaps hate is as infectious as love; at any rate, I never went near the girls in San José, and there were lots of them there. I never saw such a town for pretty girls. It's famous for its beauties; but their smiles were wasted on me. I came to San Lorenzo heart-whole, and then I met you. You opened the door, do you remember, and asked me what I wanted. You wore a terra-cotta coloured frock, with black velvet bands upon it, and your hair was in curls down your back. As you stood in the doorway, with your big brown eyes staring up into mine, I said to myself, this is the sweetest little woman in all the world."

"Is it so?" she murmured. "Is it really so?"

She was trembling with joy. For truth is seldom mistaken for falsehood, and the tender tones of Chillingworth's voice were not to be simulated.

"Is it really so?" he repeated, smiling. "Yes, I can prove it. Do you remember a picnic, a barbecue, that we went to long ago? Yes. And

do you also remember losing a pretty handkerchief, and asking me to help you to find it? Ah, you have not forgotten. Well, all the time that handkerchief was in my pocket, and I have it still."

He pulled out his pocket-book, and showed her the small square of cambric.

"Yes," she said thoughtfully; "it's my handkerchief. You have loved me all these years. I wonder if there is another girl in California who has such a lover."

Then she put up her face and kissed him for the first time almost solemnly, as if she were ratifying a vow.

Presently she told him, in an awestruck whisper, of what had passed during the night.

"But, Damaris," he replied seriously, "you cannot believe that a voice spoke to you from the dead? You were dreaming, little woman. What more natural?"

"I was not dreaming, Will."

"You were certainly dreaming," he persisted. "And in your sleep you threw away a valuable ring. Let me see, your window faces south. Probably you were standing squarely facing it. Come, we will go and look for the ring."

But she hung back, beseeching him to humour her even if he refused to credit her tale.

"What! And lose a valuable gem. Damaris, I am going to find that ring. Will you come with me?"

He was not to be gainsaid, and together they

passed out of the parlour and into the *emparedo*. Mrs. Fish was awaiting them, well primed with congratulation. Chillingworth kissed her, and pressed her plump hands.

"It didn't take you by surprise, did it?" said he.

"No," she replied. "I was—er—prepared; but of course the breaking up of a home, Mr. Chillingworth—I should say, William—is trying. I couldn't sleep last night, not a wink, thinking of you and my little girl. I feel a wreck this morning, a perfect wreck. I doubt whether I'll be able to assist Mrs. Lowly receive her guests this afternoon. I promised to help freeze the ice cream, too, but— You'll take care of Damaris? Yes. Oh yes. And—how's that? Loved her since she was a child! Did you now? Well, you couldn't deceive me. I knew that you were contemplating matrimony. I told Mrs. Skenk only yesterday that I expected to lose Damaris; and I couldn't give her to a better man."

She shook her finger playfully at Chillingworth, and retreated into the house, protesting that lovers should be left alone. Damaris stared open-mouthed at the widow's rosy face and arch smiles. A wreck! Well, if wrecks could bob buoyantly up and down, fly their bravest bunting, and spread every stitch of canvas in the teeth of a contrary wind, then, truly, Mrs. Fish was, as she said, a perfect wreck!

"The good mother," said Chillingworth, waving his hand, and nodding his head in response to the wreck's last signals, "is delighted, but it pleases

her to pretend that she is not. What a brave, faithful soul it is! Why, Damaris, what are you laughing at?"

"At you," she retorted, the dimples indenting her cheeks. "You talk of mother as if she were eighty. There is not five years' difference between you. Indeed, you might be engaged to her at this very moment instead of to me, if—if——"

"If you had never been born. Damaris, I see no reason why your mother should not live with us, or we with her—eh?"

"No," she answered with emphasis; "I should grow jealous of her." She smiled, and laid her hand upon his arm. "Will," she whispered, and the words were sweeter than a caress, "we will live together—alone. I won't share you with any person living."

After this speech was suitably acknowledged, the search for the ring began. Chillingworth's keen eyes detected a glitter of gold in the heart of a clump of malva.

"It is here," he cried triumphantly.

He picked it up, and examined the gem with curiosity.

"Why, Damaris," he cried in astonishment, "this is your profile! What a remarkable coincidence! A wonderful ring! How many pretty fingers has it encircled, eh? How many vows have been pledged upon it—and broken? It is evidently very, very old—a genuine antique. I would dare swear that it came from Egypt, perhaps from Thebes."

"How much you know," said the girl, surprised at his enthusiasm.

"I've always been interested in gems," he replied, holding the intaglio up to the light, and noting the depth of colour. "And at San José there was a professor who had a cabinet full of old rings—Greek, Roman, and Egyptian. If he could see this he would go perfectly crazy."

"Will," she said earnestly, "throw it away. No; let us make a fire and burn it up."

"Not much," he answered, still intent upon the amazing lustre of the emerald. "What! Destroy the most beautiful ring I've ever seen? Is thy servant a Vandal that he should do this thing?"

"It is accursed, Will."

"Then you shall remove the spell. The kiss of a lovely maid would turn Satan into a monk, or a monk into Satan. Give me your hand. Let me place it on your finger. No? Well, then, what shall we do with it?"

Her obstinacy began to pique him; for his sense of the ridiculous had been provoked. And besides, he liked to have his own way. The whims of a pretty girl, he thought, must be respected, but not to the extent of destroying valuable property. He begged Damaris to oblige him, but she refused, her white face and trembling lips testifying to her distress. Chillingworth was in a quandary. He began to realize that something serious was at stake. He must prove to this foolish child that her apprehensions were absurd.

"I shall wear it myself," he said quietly, slipping the ring on to his fourth finger. "We will see whether it is accursed. Evil, Damaris, comes from within, not from without."

She raised her troubled eyes to his. "You have had your own way," she murmured; "and, perhaps, you are right; your reason justifies you; but, Will, isn't a woman's instinct to be trusted too?"

"No more than a woman's face," he replied with a laugh. Then, seeing that the answer had hurt her, he whispered a thousand tender words, weaving the old, old spells in the old, old fashion. Lovers' vows are writ in water—a better medium, surely, than ink. For to those who have never passed the ivory gate, what pen can hope to describe the glories within; and to those who have seen and heard, mere words are an idle mockery!

Chillingworth spent all that happy day with Damaris, and part of the following morning. Mike Mellish, he decided, would certainly remain in Ireland, and it might be policy to give him elbow-room. He instructed Mudgit to speed the squatters on their way to Tulare with the promise of a few more dollars upon arrival, a plan that worked admirably. Mellish must be brought to terms by Norah. As he rode up the San Julian cañon, the lawyer speculated vaguely upon a subject that hitherto had escaped his attention. Was happiness given only to the chosen few? Or was it, as some held, distributed impartially amongst all? In Mellish he recognized a kindred spirit, a man

with an iron will and a body to match it. He, out of all the squatters, had alone succeeded. He—it seemed a pitiful fact—had demonstrated to Dennis Fabian the real value of the San Julian grant!

At the sight of Norah—whom he found alone in the O'Conner cabin—his sympathy with Mike bubbled over. The poor girl was so polite, so pretty, and so artless.

"Shure," said she, "I'll be afther seein' Mike; but it's not aisy to dhrive a Donegal pig to market. Yure honour manes well, but yure askin' for fifteen years of a man's loife. It's too much entirely! Ay, the law says he must lave, but Mike has always been forninst the law. He's made a mule out of himself workin' day an' noight in these hills, an' it's hard to see another stippin' into the shoes that uv just become aisy. An' we'd been married, sor, in June. To think o' that, an' thin rimimber what's happened here in April. Och! I'm heart-sick!"

She covered her face with her blue-checked apron, and cried quite simply and copiously.

Chillingworth felt a strange tightening of the muscles in his throat.

"Cheer up, Norah," he said kindly. "Perhaps you and I together can bring Mike to book. And Father Rochelle shall marry you this June. I'll make that my own particular business. I want to get married myself, and I know just how you feel. Dry your eyes and come with me."

"Yure not afraid o' Mike?" she said, wiping her eyes and pulling down her sleeves.

"I'm afraid of only one person," he replied, "and she is a girl like yourself. When she looks at me in a certain way I want to run."

"It's not much runnin' ye do," retorted Norah, plucking up her courage and smiling through her tears. "Ye'll be runnin' to the gyurls, yure honour, an' not away from thim. Although," she added slyly, "ther's bigger men than you that can't say 'boo' to a woman."

She chatted confidentially to Chillingworth as they walked down the slopes that led to the claim of Mellish, describing her native town overlooking the wild Atlantic, and the struggle for existence both in the old Ireland and in the new, and embellishing her simple narrative with a wealth of detail and local colour that fired the envy of the practised pleader.

"I was right," he thought, "to bring her with me. What charm the witch has!"

Then he recalled the drink-sodden faces of her father and brothers, and marvelled still more. It was the first time in his life that he had actually concerned himself about the welfare of peasants, between whose daily lives and his own was a barrier that only sympathy could surmount. As he walked beside this young girl, shortening his stride to match hers, and leading his horse by the bridle, he reflected that a rider might dismount occasionally with advantage to himself and perhaps others. Norah's humour, and good humour, in the teeth of the bitterest misfortune, were a revelation.

They found Mellish leaning gloomily upon the corral gate. He nodded carelessly to Norah, but took no notice of the lawyer.

"Yure not workin', Mike?"

"I am not. Why should I work?"

"Come, come," said Chillingworth, pleasantly, "don't look so glum, Mike."

"Mr. Mellish, if ye plaze."

"With all my heart. Do you think, Mr. Mellish, that it *pays* any man, no matter how strong and smart he may be, to fight single-handed against Uncle Sam? Be reasonable. I've taken the trouble to ride out here alone for the sole purpose of appealing to what is best in you—your love for Norah. Accept my terms, and you can settle down comfortably elsewhere, and marry her right away. Refuse them, and you must lose not only the results of the last fifteen years' labour, but you may lose her."

"Mike," implored the girl, timidly touching his coat sleeve—"Mike darlin', be raysonable! Yure standin'—as Mither Chillingworth says—alone. Even Father Rochelle has towld ye that ye'd betther take half a loaf when it's held out to yez."

"To the devil wid yure half loaf. Yure fooled, Norah, by the oily tongue of a rogue that lives by lyin'. It's plain-speakin' I'm giving yez," he added, turning his fierce eyes upon Chillingworth.

"Mike, Mike——"

"Don't Mike me," he retorted, flinging aside her constraining arm. "Yure like the rest o' the O'Connors. The blandishmints of a rogue are meat an' dhrink to a fool. What d'ye mane by walkin' an' talkin' wid this man? Ye know what he's done in Ireland. That wherever he stips, black ruin follows. A dacent girl wouldn't be seen wid the likes o' him. Go home—go home, Norah, an' lave me to deal wid the dirty thafe an' liar!"

He raised his voice as he marked the effect of his insults upon Chillingworth. The lawyer's face was very white, and his lips were trembling.

"See, the coward wilt!" jeered Mellish.

"Stop," said Chillingworth, so fiercely that the giant recoiled. "Not another word, sir, before this unfortunate girl. I came here in her interest more than yours. Next time I shall bring Cassidy and his deputies. Come, Norah, I'll see you to the door of your cabin."

"I'll stay wid Mike," she murmured. "Ye've done yure best, Mither Chillingworth. Yure no coward, but a kind brave man."

This ill-advised recognition of truth maddened Mellish.

"Ye came wid him, an' ye'll go wid him. Yure not fit to be an honest man's wife. Mike Mellish 'll never marry the lavins of a blagyard!"

Chillingworth led the weeping girl to the tree where his horse was tied. The voice of Mike pursued them.

"Ye'll pay for this," he shouted hoarsely, "both

of yez—an' soon! Mike Mellish has nothin' to lose now!"

"He's mad," muttered the lawyer—"quite mad!"

"Ay," sobbed Norah, "but it's Dinnis Fabian that has turned him crazy. The curse o' God is on us; for why? Yure a cliver man—tell me what I've done? Oh, Mike—Mike!"

The silver-tongued lawyer could find no words to stem the tide of her distress. Into his own heart there crept for the first time a horrid fear that this work to which he had set his hand had the devil's seal upon it, as well as that of the President of the United States. In silence he climbed the flowery hills, crushing underfoot the exquisite poppies and pansies. Why did they bloom so bravely only to be destroyed? At the top of the hill he bade Norah good-bye.

"Thank you, yure honour," she murmured, as Chillingworth pressed her hand at parting. "I'm afraid that Mike—that Mike——"

"You need not fear, Norah. I shall not hurt Mike."

"No; but Mike may hurt you, yure honour. Don't—don't come again to Ireland. Ye towld me there was one who loved yez. Kape at home for her sake."

Chillingworth touched his horse with the spur, and rode on. This pestilent savage threatened not only his life, but the happiness of the girl he loved. He had never thought of that before. If he, Chillingworth, fell a victim to this madman's rage,

Damaris would bear upon her tender shoulders the burden of a terrible sorrow. He could not doubt that the shock of his violent death would bruise her life irreparably. It is easy for some men to die; under certain conditions it is hard to live. Chillingworth had faced death more than once without blenching, but life had always seemed well worth the struggle. But now—if Damaris were taken from him, would he be of the same opinion? He smiled grimly as he reflected that death is protean, a chameleon who changes colour a dozen times for a dozen men, aye, and for the same man!

Then he laughed aloud at his fears. He had a fixed belief in his own fate. There was so much work and so few good workers in the world. William Chillingworth could not be spared. Mike Mellish, however, would not be missed, except by pretty Norah.

By this time he had reached the head of what is now called Calamity Cañon. Here the main road forked, one trail leading to the O'Connor claim, and the other to Mellish's ranch and all the country that lay to the east and north of it. To the right was an inaccessible hill covered with cacti and manzanita; to the left yawned a ragged gorge, at the bottom of which tinkled the San Julian creek. Chillingworth, deep in thought, was startled by the whinny of a horse. Looking up he saw Mellish astride his buckskin mare, not twenty paces distant.

"I towld yez," said the Irishman, "that we'd meet again, an' soon."

Chillingworth reined in his horse. "What do you want?" he asked quietly.

"What do I want?" The man laughed derisively. "Ye know well, ye blagyard, what I want. Ye've schamed to rob me of my land; ye've bland-andhered Norah, an' all me friends, till ther's not a sowl in the county I can turn to for hilp an' a kyind word. An' ye sit there wid a face o' flint an' ask what do I want! Curse yez! I want yure life. I want to tear out yure lyin' tongue, to see yure blood stainin' the very soil yure stalin'!"

"I gave you credit," retorted the lawyer, "for being a man. To waylay me like this"—the Mellish blunderbuss was in the Irishman's hands—"is the act of a bully and coward. Shoot, sir, and be d—d to you!"

"Faith," said Mellish, "it's you that'll be d—d, ye cursed heretic! Pull out yure gun."

Chillingworth stirred uneasily in his saddle. Yes, he carried a pistol. Perhaps if he were unarmed this fanatic would let him pass.

"Ye pack a gun," cried the giant, fingering the trigger of his weapon. "Yure not the coward I thought ye were; but ye'll niver tell me that ye came alone to see me unheeled!"

Would that he could have given this assurance.

"Man," he said, with emphasis, "stand aside! Kill me, and you will hang for it, high as Haman. And why do you seek my life? Conceding that you are in the right, and Dennis Fabian in the wrong, what good will my death do you, or your

case? Others will enforce the law. You are mad, Mike Mellish."

"Pull out yure gun."

The lawyer crossed his arms and stared steadily into Mike's bloodshot eyes. It occurred to him that he might draw his pistol and toss it into the ravine. Mellish, he was convinced, would not murder him, but the least movement of his right hand would provoke the enemy's fire.

"And if I carry no pistol?" he asked coolly.

"I've seen it," said Mellish, contemptuously. "D'yez think I don't know the shape of a six-shooter. Whin ye turned away wid Norah, I saw yure gun in yure hip pocket. Ye don't fool wid me another minit. Ye carry six bullets, an' I've but two charges, but they're buckshot. I'll count foive. At foive ye'll draw an' shoot, an' so will I. One!"

"For God's sake——"

"Two!"

"For Norah's sake——"

"Three! Four!"

Chillingworth spurred his horse violently, and drew his weapon.

"Foive!"

Both men fired at the same moment; but the Irishman's hand was trembling with insane rage, and his mare, a Californian bronco, had grown restive. The buckshot flew wide of their mark, but the bullet found its billet in Mellish's brain. Without a groan he crashed from the saddle to the ground, and lay there motionless. He was stone dead!

CHAPTER IV.

CALAMITY CAÑON.

THE inquest upon Mellish's body was held the following afternoon in San Lorenzo, at the undertaking "parlours" of Mr. Josiah Flint. This gentleman was a pillar of the Presbyterian Church, and the most saintly of Mrs. Skenk's boarders. His bodily presence, it is true, was somewhat contemptible, but he wore as large a hat as any man in Southern California. Upon the present unhappy occasion he was afire with importance and energy. The crowd outside his show window was the biggest he had ever seen, and the most inquisitive.

"Yes, yes," he said, as he passed out and in, "it's the finest kind o' advertisement for me, and I never carried a prettier line o' caskets. How's that? Yes; we all must die. I never forget that. A man may deny himself butcher's meat, and never go nigh a barber's shop, but he must have a coffin when his call comes."

Mr. Flint, indeed, from mere force of habit, considered every fellow-citizen as a possible nay,

probable, customer. An intelligent stranger, meeting the undertaker for the first time, would be conscious of something uncanny in his glance, a professional keenness of gaze that was explained later upon the receipt of Mr. Flint's business card, black-bordered, with "Embalming a specialty" in small script in the corner.

It was known on the street that an eye-witness of the shooting had presented himself to the coroner. Rockwood Tinkum—better known as Uncle Rocksie—testified that he was abroad in the San Julian cañon upon the previous afternoon.

"I was takin' the air," he told the jury, "an' mebbee locatin' a deer, when I seed Mike Mellish a ridin' out o' the brush. He carried a scatter gun, an', thinks I, he's lookin' for quails."

"Did you speak to him, Mr. Tinkum?"

"I did not, sir. Them Irishers think they've a nateral cinch on all the deers in Ireland, so I jest laid low, an' waited. Pretty soon Mr. Chillingworth come along, a hangin' his head, an' a walkin' his horse. This is straight goods I'm givin' you, gen'lemen."

"I hope so," said the coroner, with emphasis. "Go on, sir."

"Well, the lawyer an' Mike howdy-do'd fer a spell, but I couldn't catch a word. Then they fit! I seed Mike drop, an' knoo that the time'd come to take a hand. So I clumb the cañon, an' ther was Mike deader'n mutton, an' Mr. Chillingworth a settin' on a rock with the tears a rollin' down his

face. When he seen me, he made a big brace. He an' me's fr'en's, gen'lemen, an' I felt it my dooty to say a kind word. 'Billy,' says I, 'Billy,' I says, 'this is bad, but it might be wuss. Ye might be a lyin' there yerself, with yer hide plum full o' button holes! Take a wad o' this!' Gen'lemen, it was the best o' rye, but he wouldn't take not a smell of it. Instead, he says, kinder wild, 'Uncle Rocksie, I've killed a woman, too. Oh, my God!' Well, gen'lemen, I peeked around, but I couldn't see no woman. Thinks I, he's crazy, sure! But I says, to humour him, 'That's bad, Billy. Wheer's the body?' 'It's Norah O'Connor,' he says; 'she was goin' to marry Mike, an' this will be the death of her!'"

"Is not this evidence rather irrelevant?" asked Dr. Tapper, the young dentist.

"I don't think so," replied the coroner. "Please continue, Mr. Tinkum."

"Well, gen'lemen, when he said that I kinder smiled—in my sleeve, o' course. The remark, to my notions as a married man, showed sech ignorance o' the sex. 'Bless yer heart,' says I, 'a woman don't die that a easy. She'll marry a better lookin' man than Mike Mellish afore the year's out!' That's what I says, but he took no more notice than if I'd kep' my mouth shet."

The witness affirmed upon oath that Chillingworth and Mellish fired simultaneously. He further deposed that, at the lawyer's request, he had remained with the body while Chillingworth rode off

to summon assistance. Tom Mudgit then testified that he was at his desk in the sheriff's office when William Chillingworth made a statement of what had occurred both before and after the shooting.

"You say that you gave him the pistol," said the coroner.

"I did. He was unwilling to take it, but I persuaded him that Mellish was dangerous."

"That will do. Call Norah O'Connor."

The unhappy girl was brought in by her father, whose moist eyes and lips testified to recent potations. Norah told the coroner what had passed in her presence between Mike and Chillingworth.

"It's not his sin that he tuk the loife of wan that was crazy wîd his wrongs, but it is his sin that he's workin' for the divil; an' for that same God and man will call him to account!"

She left the stand with these words upon her trembling lips, and they produced a profound impression. The jury brought in a verdict of justifiable homicide, and the proceedings were at an end; for the district attorney assured Chillingworth that he should waive further inquiry. Cassidy shook the lawyer's hand with unnecessary vigour, and offered in a loud voice to provide a guard.

"Thank you," replied Chillingworth, "I can take care of myself."

The fact that he had refused protection spread abroad, and cautious men shook their heads. The O'Connors and their friends laughed significantly. Josiah Flint and Dr. Tapper walked to Mrs. Skenk's

house, and poured into the ears of their hostess a flood of comment and conjecture. Death, according to Mr. Flint, had few terrors for an undertaker; but Norah's *curse*, as he put it, left a dark brown taste in his mouth!

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Skenk, sharply.

It was this lady's habit and pleasure to spend an hour between five and six in her front parlour "conversing" with such of her gentleman boarders as chose to avail themselves of what in San Lorenzo circles was considered a privilege. The front parlour lent itself to the exchange of gossip as the light from the heavily curtained windows was too uncertain to permit of reading or needlework, and served to obscure rather than illumine a set of ancient horsehair furniture, a marble-topped table upon which reposed the only book in the room, the family bible, and sundry specimens of shell-work and wax flowers that adorned the walls, the handicraft of the Misses Skenk.

"It's not nonsense," replied the undertaker, softly, for he feared the tongue of this tall, angular woman. "O' course William Chillingworth had to shoot, but he's in a mighty poor business."

"I dun'no', Mr. Flint; that's as may be. For myself, I'd sooner fuss with the livin' than with the dead. You've no call to abuse a fellow-boarder an' a real elegant gen'leman."

"I ain't abusing him, Mis' Skenk; I'm a Christian, I hope."

Mr. Flint leaned back in his chair, and rubbed

his head against an antimacassar of imperial purple satin, fringed with emerald green silk.

"Mercy sakes!" exclaimed the owner of this gorgeous cloth, "if you are a Christian, Mr. Flint, please sit up an' behave like one. I'd 'most as lief you'd blacken William Chillingworth's character as to dirty that tidy. Alvir was three weeks makin' of it!"

"Anyways," said the undertaker, solemnly, "the trouble is only just begun. We've not seen the end of it, Mrs. Skenk. No, ma'am; no, indeed."

"Well," replied Mrs. Skenk, with deliberation, "it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. If a few o' these Irish Catholics get killed, why, mebbee, you'll buy them corner lots you was talkin' about."

"The doctor thinks as I do, Mis' Skenk. Don't you, doctor?"

Yes; Dr. Tapper confessed to sundry qualms. "I've looked into," said he, "and worked around, some o' the awfulest mouths in the west, and standing all day makes a man mighty strong in the legs; but when I saw that girl's white face and heard those words dropping slow and heavy out of her poor twisted soul, why, then, Mrs. Skenk, my knees weakened, and I felt goose-flesh all around the nape of my neck. I weigh close on to two hundred and twenty pounds, but I was scart!"

"Well," replied Mrs. Skenk, solemnly, "ye're both boarders, but I won't hear a word against William Chillingworth, not a word. To think o'

him gives me the creeps. He didn't sleep a wink last night. I heard him trapesin' up an' down his room for hours. He's took this awful hard. I told him Mellish was a Catholic, an' a furriner, but he jest shook his head. It didn't seem to make a mite o' difference. 'Mis' Skenk,' he says, an' all the laughter 'd gone out of his voice, 'Mis' Skenk, I have that man's blood upon my hands. No water and no sympathy can wash it away.'"

"That's so," said the little undertaker. He was secretly in love with Mrs. Skenk's youngest daughter, Samantha.

"It ain't so," retorted Mrs. Skenk. "I'm a church member, but I say that William Chillingworth has no call to feel bad. He's actin' a leetle fullish."

"He is," murmured Mr. Flint.

"Don't you dare to say it, Mr. Flint. I repeat that William Chillingworth's actin' a leetle fullish in givin' up the pistol that saved his life. He may need it again."

"What!" exclaimed both the men.

"I'm no talker myself," said Mrs. Skenk, with emphasis, "but I hear more'n most folks. Them O'Connors ain't to be trusted. They'll do Mr. Chillingworth a mischief—if he don't watch out. But he won't watch out. He's not that kind. If it was you, Mr. Flint, you'd——"

"I wouldn't act foolish, Mis' Skenk."

"You'd go east," continued his future mother-in-law, tartly.

Mr. Flint was a warm man, and Samantha looked

upon him with favour, but Mrs. Skenk could never forget that he was too short in the leg. He was supposed to be an expert embalmer, but he manipulated the quick with less skill. His lack of tact often offended Mrs. Skenk, too outspoken herself to appreciate bluntness in others. Upon the Sunday preceding he had most audaciously taken his hostess to task. She had favoured, so he said, William Chillingworth in the matter of turkey dressing. "I only want my rights," he had said. "If you had your rights, Josiah Flint," Mrs. Skenk had replied with some heat, "you wouldn't be able to see 'em with a microscope!

"Yes, you'd go east," she continued; "an' I dun'no' that sech a trip would hurt you any. Travel biggens little men."

This was too much for the undertaker. He rose with dignity, and left the room.

Dr. Tapper laughed. "You're hard on Flint," he said.

"Well, he's hard on others—his betters."

"He has his soft spot, Mrs. Skenk."

"Yes, mebbee. In his head, I reckon."

"You'll lose a good boarder, ma'am."

"He's aggravatin', doc, an' wiggly. I never could respect wiggly men. Samantha takes after her paw."

This seemingly inconsequent remark was not wasted upon the stout dentist.

"Yes," he said slowly; "but Sairey is like her mother. In the matter o' daughters, Mis' Skenk,

you can count yourself blessed among women." He sighed deeply.

"Alviry," replied the fond mother, "is the pick o' the basket. Doctor, say—I've a notion to ask ye a plain question in confidence. William Chillingworth's been a-boardin' with me for ten year—a big slice out of a life—an' I know him to be an elegant gen'leman, a credit to this town, or any other. He ain't the kind to fool with a young girl's heart, but hearts are contrary. An' Alviry acted queer the other day. Tell me now, you've not got any idee that she favours him?"

"I don't think so," replied the dentist, cautiously.

"Well, I wish for his sake that he'd take a trip, a holiday. He might come back in six months. Folks will talk, but it ain't in reason that they'll talk long about one man."

Curiously enough, at this very moment Damaris was urging her lover to leave California, and visit his old home. She shyly offered to accompany him. Being a true woman, blessed with brains as well as insight, she had expressed in regard to the tragedy an indifference she was far from feeling. Chillingworth's distress had moved her profoundly, for at heart she shared his horror of bloodshed. In her case, however, joy tempered sorrow; the man she loved was unhurt, having escaped a charge of buck-shot as if by a miracle. Truly he must be destined to sit in the seats of the mighty!

Her gratitude found expression in a thousand tender caresses. Chillingworth, transported by these

ardours of purest affection, cast care to the winds, and vowed upon her sweet lips unstinted devotion. But he refused to leave San Lorenzo.

"My dearest," he said, "with all your cleverness, you have not mastered the alphabet of life. Few women do. I learned it at the hands of a master. Reuben Oldfield treated me shabbily, but he taught me how to pull in a tug of war. You must never let go. The steady strain tells in the end. If I went away for a few months, I should not recover the ground lost in as many years. There is Dennis Fabian, for instance. He has his eye on me. Why? Because I've studied his interests as if they were my own. He knows that I can serve him better, more faithfully, than any other lawyer in this county——"

"Or in any other," murmured Damaris.

"Your goose is not a swan," he replied. "California has many lawyers. Fabian can always find competent men. The fact that he employs me is a certificate of capacity; no man could wish for a more flattering testimonial. *But*, if I let the conduct of his affairs slip between my fingers, I should be branded, justly or unjustly, with the odious word 'failure.' He will be bitterly displeased at—at what has just happened."

"You have seen Mr. Fabian?"

"Never."

"Has he a family?"

"Yes. I think his wife is dead. He has two children, who will inherit his millions. He is said

to be the best judge of men in this state. I believe he boasts that he has never made a mistake. He picks his tools, and uses them like a workman."

"I hate the word 'tool.' You are not his tool."

"Yes, I am."

"I cannot bear to think so."

"He uses me, as I use Cassidy and Tom Mudgit. This is prose, not poetry. I'm a tool, Damaris. A buzz-saw—eh?"

Damaris was vaguely disturbed at this declaration of dependence. She was too loyal to the traditions of her sex and country not to resent the personal application of a law that turned free-born American citizens into slaves. Yet her reason told her that Chillingworth was proclaiming his own emancipation.

"The only chains," he said, smiling, "are those of ignorance. A hundred years hence ignorance will be counted a penal offence. I know too much to undervalue, or overvalue, my professional services to Fabian. At present I am his tool. The day may come when I shall call myself his right bower."

"The day will come sooner," she said quietly, "when you may call yourself, if you please, his nephew!"

"His nephew?" He stared askance at the word.

She paused, marshalling the thoughts that jostled each other for utterance. This man, whom her mother had deliberately accused of trading upon information given him under the seal of confidence, had actually never considered the nature of it. Her

heart beat triumphantly as she reflected that her trust in him was so fully vindicated.

"If you marry me, you will surely be his nephew."

"I had never thought of it," he answered. "And I should never press a claim which he repudiated."

"Nor I," she said proudly. "Will, I love you with all my heart." She spoke vehemently.

"What prompted that delightful sentence?"

She came closer to him, and touched his crisp curls.

"I'm a lucky girl," she whispered; "I've found my mate. Do you know anything of the habits of the oil beetle? You don't? Well, I'll tell you. The larva is yellow, and it crawls up the stems of plants, trying to find some composite flower with a yellow centre. If it finds just what it wants, it waits patiently till a bee comes along. Then it fastens on to the bee, and takes another voyage of discovery. If the bee drops the poor larva into a cell full of honey, the larva is drowned in sweetness, like that unhappy Duke of Clarence in his butt of Malmsey; but if there is an egg in the cell, the larva makes a small hole in it, crawls in, eating up the contents, and in the fulness of time turns into an oil beetle. Then I suppose it is happy. But it runs so many chances of being destroyed before it finds the egg. And girls run nearly as many before they marry the one man they are all looking for."

"And what happens if they never find him?" said Chillingworth.

"They don't develop, you stupid man. I wonder what sort of beetle I shall be. I am still a larva."

"A beetle indeed! A lovely butterfly."

"A beetle is much more useful than a butterfly, and quite as beautiful in my eyes. Do you think, Will, I shall be able to help you in your work?"

"Of course," he answered vaguely. He was conscious as he spoke that women had plenty to do in this world without interfering with the work of men.

"I should like to be something more to you than a mere housekeeper—a real helpmate. Tell me of your plans, dear."

He did not reply at once. The claims of Damaris upon his confidence were not to be repudiated, but a habit of reticence made speech sticky. Oldfield had warned him a thousand times against the folly of parading plans. "The man who tells his schemes," said Uncle Reuben, "gives himself and them dead away."

Chillingworth tried to escape with a periphrase. "My castles are of the air, airy," he said lightly, "and just at present they are obscured by clouds; but you, my sweet star, shine upon all of them."

She smiled, well-pleased at the compliment. "Are they real castles," she asked coaxingly, "or only Queen Anne cottages?"

"They are not cottages," he replied slowly.

"I could be happy with you, Will, in a log-cabin."

He kissed her upturned face, but said nothing. He had seen many log-cabins.

"Have you set your heart on the castle, Will?"

"Yes, Damaris, I have. But brains, not brag, must build it. For that reason I don't care to put my hopes into words. Several millions of my fellow-citizens expect to live in castles, but most of them are destined to die in board and batten houses!"

"Few can shave Shagpat," said the girl, dreamily. "Shagpat?"

She told him of Meredith's famous allegory, so full of wildest frolic and sanest wisdom. Chillingworth listened to the story of the thwackings, of Aklis, of the genie Karaz, of the Queen of Illusions.

"I have had no time to read novels," he said, when she had finished her tale, "but I must certainly shave Shagpat. I have had my thwackings."

"The barber," she murmured in his ear, "would never have cut off the Identical, if it had not been for Noorna."

"Damaris," he said suddenly, "surely you would not be content to live in such a miserable hole as San Lorenzo? You are well-equipped for the highest social life. And, by Heaven! you shall have the position to which you're entitled. Dennis Fabian shall seek you as his niece yet!"

"Don't be too confident, Will."

He looked at his watch and rose.

"You will stay to supper?"

"No. Your mother, Damaris, shrinks from me. She can't disguise her feelings. I don't blame her, but I would rather go home. And I must spend a

couple of hours in the office. Good-night, my dearest."

"Will," she whispered, as he held her in his arms, "don't be angry, but before you go give me the ring."

The first frown she had seen upon his face since their engagement made deep lines between his brows.

"You foolish child! You don't connect the ring with——"

"I do. Give me the ring, Will."

"This comes of reading the Arabian Nights, Damaris. No, you little witch, you shall not have the ring. I wear your face upon my finger and upon my heart. I'll give you back your ring when I cease to love you, and not before."

After he had gone she returned to the sitting-room, and sat down in the Rev. Abner's chair. Her lover had arrived in supreme depression and distress. He had gone away laughing. She was content, and more than half convinced that fancy had fooled her both in regard to the ring and the dream. Material considerations were uppermost in her mind; and the personal magnetism of Chillingworth swayed her sensibilities, as the strong trade-wind sways the leaves of the cottonwoods. The desirability of wealth had never troubled her. According to the Rev. Abner, the possession of much money implied vast responsibility. Those who lived nearest the stars were never rich as Chillingworth interpreted the word. But if he chose to live on the plains, she

would turn her face from the mountains. A certain curiosity pricked her imagination as she lay back in the well-worn chair; a new interest in an undiscovered country stirred her pulses.

These maiden meditations were put to flight by Mrs. Fish.

"Surely," said that lady, "you heard the supper bell?"

"How could I?" replied Damaris, following her mother into the small dining-room. "I was in Europe when it rang, driving in the Champs Élysées."

Mrs. Fish sniffed. A confirmed literalist, she took exception to most things she did not understand.

"Yes," continued the girl, brightly, "I'd just left the Salon and was on my way to the Bois de Boulogne. Have you a headache, mother? You look distressed."

"I feel distressed, Damaris; and—and you, my dear, show a strange lack of feeling. The whole town knows that you are engaged to that poor man whose hands are dyed with the blood of a fellow-creature. It's terrible to laugh and joke at such times. A woman with heart"—she pressed her well-covered left ribs—"couldn't act so. Shall I help you to steak or fried ham?"

"To neither, thank you."

Mrs. Fish piled up her own plate; then she said, "You'd better eat some steak, child; Mary has cooked it very nicely. Where's your appetite?"

Damaris laughed, and Mrs. Fish frowned.

"We must compromise, mother. Do you remember the verses about the young man who whistled that he might not weep. I laugh for the same reason. But I cannot eat. Now, you can do justice to that nice steak, but you cannot laugh."

"You're a strange girl, Damaris."

"Because I would sooner laugh than eat. My laughter may help others, but a plate full of steak benefits none but myself."

Mrs. Fish sniffed for the second time. She had come to the conclusion that argument, even when fortified by Scripture, was wasted upon Damaris. As she slowly masticated her food, she reflected complacently that she at any rate had done her duty by the orphan; the spank had not been spared, nor the timely rebuke—and she had always insisted upon woollen underclothing in winter, that treacherous season when the days were warm and the nights cool. Yes; she had done her duty. Now, the sooner the girl was married the better.

"Have you and William Chillingworth fixed upon your wedding-day?"

"He says he cannot wait long."

"Why should he? Yes, my dear, you'd better name an early day. I was pricing goods this afternoon at Rosenbaum's. He has some pongees that are real pretty. Mrs. Lowly was in the store, and she asked me if you liked the bead pattern in forks or the old fiddle. I said we'd used the fiddle pattern for twenty years, and that I guessed you were tired of it."

"Oh no; I like it for that very reason."

"I might have known that you'd think different to me. She's going to give you two dozen forks. It's very kind of her, but I do wish she would quit the morphine habit; it's sinful in a church member. The doctor is taking to whisky. I wouldn't repeat the name of the person who told me so for a thousand dollars, but it was Miss Popper, who was most anxious that I should see her line of summer hats. I stepped in, and found them talking of nothing but the inquest. Dr. Lowly is the coroner, and Miss Popper took me aside and told me that the doctor helped himself out of a barrel at the back o' the drug-store. Her brother, you know, works there, so it must be true. Mercy me, this is an awful world! Miss Popper thinks that the new pinks will suit your skin. I said your colour was too yellow for pink, but she was as obstinate as an old maid can be. She thinks that Josiah Flint expects to marry Samantha Skenk. It wouldn't surprise me a bit. He has a nice business and money on deposit. What? You wouldn't marry an undertaker! I should hope not indeed. Marry a tradesman! As the wife of a minister, I must meet and know everybody who is respectable, but I wouldn't allow you to marry out of your own class. Oh, you meant that if you were Samantha Skenk you wouldn't marry Josiah Flint! Well, why didn't you say so? I don't agree with you. I never do. Mr. Flint is a good, virtuous man, even if he is short in the leg. His wife will keep a hired

girl, and perhaps her own phaeton. I must say, Damaris, that you are sadly in need of a little common sense."

"Yes, and other qualities."

Respect for this woman, who had been the wife of her saint, was lacking, and love, and honour, and sympathy. Why had the Rev. Abner married this weak-witted talker—this snapper-up of gutter gossip? Why—why? Because she was pretty, with the milk and roses of a dairy-maid? Or, had her character changed in twenty years?

"Upon my word," said Mrs. Fish, "you look glum enough now. I thought my budget of news would interest you."

"It did interest me. You—you are a very interesting woman, mother; and you are still very pretty. Was father much in love with you before you married?"

Mrs. Fish purred. "Before and after, my dear. I think I may say that as long as he lived he worshipped the very ground I walked on. The poor dear man—Damaris, don't rattle your teaspoon in that unladylike way—the poor dear man, I repeat, worshipped me! He had his faults, but he thought me perfect!"

Was this comedy, Damaris asked herself, or tragedy? Surely the patience of the Rev. Abner had been sublime. He had never betrayed himself to the woman he had sworn to honour. He had lavished upon her a tenderness that never failed. He had died and made no sign. Yet Damaris knew

well what he must have suffered—regret, disgust, the most horrible satiety. The eyes she bent upon the table were wet with sympathy.

After supper Mrs. Fish, draped in her best black silk, betook herself to a praise service at the Presbyterian church. Damaris stayed at home with her thoughts—a motley company. In her mother's presence she denied herself the luxury of sitting quietly in a chair, for Mrs. Fish abhorred any appearance of physical indolence. The sight of her husband at peace with his reflections never failed to provoke a sneer. "Why don't you do something, Abner?" she would say tartly. "My dear," he would reply, "I am busy with my thoughts." This mild answer was invariably capped by, "I wish to goodness, Mr. Fish, that you would learn to think aloud!"

The girl lit the fire, for the night had turned chilly, and the old *adobe* house was damp. Then she drew the curtains, and prepared to enjoy herself. She could hear Mary, the Mexican servant woman, crooning a love song in the kitchen, one of those plaintive lays that touch the heart. The burden of it floated through the big door that stood ajar—

"Adios, adios! para siempre—adios!"

It seemed to her not only a farewell between lovers, but a last word from the Anglo-Saxon to the Latin race. She knew that the Spanish, as they were called, were flitting, silent and unprotesting, from the land they loved. At whose command?

In obedience, so said Chillingworth, to the laws of evolution. But the Rev. Abner had held otherwise. The lust of power and dominion had ever provoked his most fiery condemnation. California, he had maintained, with its soft, sensuous climate, was the natural home of a southern people, of a pastoral race content to live and let live. Woe to the oppressor of these! And woe to the children of the oppressor, the third and fourth generations, who would lack the stamina and enterprise of the pioneers!

Would the curse fall upon her, and her children?

She had sat by the fire for nearly an hour when a tap upon the door—a soft, discreet tap—made her spring to her feet. Visitors approached the house through the *emparedo*, but the parlour door faced the lawn, and was seldom used. Perhaps it was Chillingworth, tired of quill-driving. No. Glancing through the window, she saw a woman heavily shawled. Damaris unlocked the door, and invited the stranger to come in. It was Norah O'Connor.

When she threw back the shawl, Damaris gasped an exclamation of pity. The pretty Irish girl looked like a rose after a sand-storm. The bloom had left her cheeks; she was haggard, unkempt, and her eyes were encircled with bistre-coloured rings.

“Whisht!” she murmured hoarsely, putting a trembling finger to her white lips. “Is—is the man ye love here?”

“He was here, two hours ago.”

“Where is he now?”

"In his office, I think."

"Could ye go to him—alone?"

"Yes; but——"

"Then, in God's name, go! The wake is at father's saloon, an' the boys are dhrinkin'. They're mad wid hate an' whisky, an' more blood will be slept. It's crazy they are; an' they'd kill me—me, their own sister—if they thought I'd come to warn yez! But I couldn't rest. Go to him ye love, an' tell him that for yure sake, not for his, I've stolen here like a thafe in the noight. Tell him that an hour since they swore to hang him this night, in the very place where—where——"

She broke down, sobbing piteously. Damaris took the soiled face between her hands and kissed the streaming eyes.

"May God bless you and comfort you," she said unsteadily.

"There is no God," said Norah, fiercely; "but"—her voice softened—"I thank ye for thim kisses, an' for the tear ye dropped on my cheek. Ther' may be life or death at stake while we're waitin' here. Go—go!"

She was gone herself before the other could speak.

A minute later Damaris was on her way to Chillingworth's office. It was nearly half-past eight, and fog as usual obscured the stars. In the moist darkness she ran swiftly, but terror outstripped her. If Chillingworth were already in the hands of these savages, a rescue would be almost

impossible. His office faced the court house, and was in the San Lorenzo bank building, a lonely place, deserted at night; and those who knew the lawyer's habits could easily surprise and overpower him there. Why had she not thought of this, and entreated him to stay at home?

As she turned into the main street, a spring waggon, furiously driven, passed her, and two men on horseback. It was too dark to distinguish anything save outlines, but the men were shouting. From accent and tone she decided that they were Irish and drunk. She quickened her pace.

Halfway up the street, however, she slacked speed. A friendly light blazed in the windows of Chillingworth's rooms, and each of its innumerable vibrations flashed the safety of her lover. Yes; he was still at work, unconscious of danger. In less than two minutes she would be clasped in his strong arms. He would kiss away her fears, and——

Suddenly her heart stopped beating. The light from the office windows had grown intolerably brilliant. Merciful God! No gas, no coal, or oil-lamp ever glowed like this! The place was afire!

She stood still, confounded with horror, her eyes reflecting the furnace wherein, for aught she knew, Chillingworth might be burning. The valves of her heart began again to perform their office. As she stumbled forward, released from the spell of paralysis, memory flung a straw to clutch at. The spring waggon! And the horsemen! Perhaps she was not too late!

As conviction smote her, the fire-bell clanged out upon the silence, and the town sprang to attention. There was an instant's pause, followed by the rush of many feet and the excited cries of men and women. A fire in a town of wooden houses menaces the fortunes of every citizen. Once more the bell pattered its grim message, and before the last notes had died away Damaris stood within the sheriff's office, staring with wild eyes into the lean face of Tom Mudgit. With amazing presence of mind she had remembered that he alone out of all the men in San Lorenzo would be found at his post—the keeper of the keys; and he, of all men, was the friend she sought. The column of flame that had dazzled her eyes illumined also perceptive faculties of no mean order. She divined that the fire was a ruse to distract the town's attention. Chillingworth, without doubt, had been overpowered, gagged, and was now on the road to Ireland. He might be hanged and buried and none be the wiser, save those who had murdered him. His friends would suppose that he had perished in the flames! This and more she laid before honest Tom, speaking with a lucidity and eloquence that carried conviction to the ears of the sheriff as well as his deputy.

"The blamed fools," said Tom, buckling on his belt, "have lighted a lantern by which we kin find horses an' men."

"That's so," muttered Cassidy. "Stay here, Tom, and I'll get half a dozen o' both in as many minutes. They've the start, Miss Damaris, but they've ten

miles to go, and we'll catch them yet. I'll lose no time, miss; I've a grudge of my own to settle with the O'Connors and their gang."

He had armed himself as he spoke, and hurried from the office. The building opposite was now a sheet of flames, against which the figures of the crowd stood out in black relief. No efforts were being made to save the bank, the water from the hoses being directed upon the houses adjoining. All the valuables were in the safe. The building itself was fully insured. Nothing could be done but to prevent the spread of fire, a comparatively easy matter, as there was no wind, a heavy fog, and not a house within a hundred feet.

In less than the time he had prescribed Cassidy returned.

"I've men, Miss Damaris, and horses. Big Anton helped me out considerable. He thinks the world o' Mr. Chillingworth. You hit the nail on the head, sure! There's not an O'Connor at the fire, and not a soul there has seen William Chillingworth. He is not in the building, for a fireman peeked in at the windows. It was a clumsy trick anyways, but it'll recoil on them as fixed it. Our horses, Tom, will be around in a minute. I've found a party to stay here, the man who was sheriff last term. How's that? No, miss, I can't allow it."

Damaris had asked for a horse. The suspense, she felt, would be intolerable.

"I cannot sit here," she cried passionately. "I'll

find a horse for myself, and follow you, whether you give me leave or not."

Cassidy looked at his deputy and shrugged his shoulders.

"By Jing!" said Tom Mudgit, "this is Californy. An' the girls—God bless 'em—do as they please. It'd kill ye sure to sit around waitin' an' mopin'. I'll find a horse for ye, by thunder! An' don't ye believe that them sons o' guns kin hurt a hair o' yer lover's head. Eagles ain't pecked to death by blue-jays!"

He laughed cheerily, and was gone.

* * * * *

That swift ride through the darkness was a strange experience for a delicately nurtured girl. It lasted little more than an hour, but during those sixty minutes Damaris crossed the brook that flows between childhood and womanhood. She never played again in the sweet-smelling meadows of youth.

A message was left at La Huerta as they passed by, and Mrs. Fish's scream of remonstrance echoed in Damaris's ears as she galloped away from childish things. Tom Mudgit was beside her, Cassidy and the others in front, with big Anton in the lead.

"They must freeze to the road," said Tom, encouragingly. "But Anton knows a cut through the hills. We'll get to the San Julian cañon ahead o' the cusses. D—n it!—I ain't a swearin', Miss Damaris; that is to say, if I make a break you'll kindly excuse me—but we have 'em *sura*. Ye

see, comin' up behind might be a leetle orkard. They're cowards—yes, a pack o' coyotes—but they're full o' liquor. An' they might shoot first, an' talk afterwards. Now, if we get the drop on 'em, they'll jest wilt. Oh Lor! ain't it a circus! I beg yer pardon, miss. It ain't a circus to you, naterally. I was speakin' professionally."

Damaris listened to his kindly words, but her thoughts were ten miles away—at the head of the fateful cañon. She was too accustomed to the saddle to be distressed by the physical exertion of the ride. On the contrary, as the horse plunged beneath her light weight, she was sensible of the supreme blessings of action. To sit passively at home, listening to the platitudes of Mrs. Fish—could inquisitor devise a more fiendish torture? Action, motion! The words and their significance thrilled her to the marrow. It was better, she reflected, to dive headlong into a well in search of the moon, than to sit supinely twirling one's thumbs in a comfortable chair. Chillingworth's spirit had touched her to whirling issues. And if he were taken, and she left alone? What then? Desolation!

They passed the lake that lies at the foot of the Bishop's mountain, startling some wild fowl that flew seaward, quacking loudly. The water stretched grey and grim into indefiniteness. Damaris had only seen the lake by daylight—a pretty mirror, framed in green and brown *tules*, reflecting the prismatic colours of hills and skies. The change suggested many thoughts.

At the northern end of the lake big Anton turned sharply to the left, striking a narrow cattle trail that none but a greaser could have found. Now the party rode in single file, but Anton spurred his stallion through the brush and never slackened rein. Cassidy cursed as the tough manzanita boughs left long wales upon his freckled face, and his quirt cut deep into the flanks of his mare. Mudgit swore also, but he took a double dose of scourging, thereby saving the soft white skin of the girl behind him.

"I never rode faster," he said to Damaris, as they emerged from the thicket and crossed a level strip of turf; "but the plugs air standin' the work fine. D'ye feel kind o' weary, Miss Damaris?"

She flouted the question with a low laugh. Weary? Did women who loved ever grow weary before their work was done?

"By Jing!" said the deputy. "Yer blooded, miss. A thoroughbred, an' no mistake!"

The horses, however, soon showed signs of distress. Heaving flanks and quivering nostrils constrained a brief halt. Cassidy seized the opportunity to unfold his plans. They were now, he said, within four miles of the spot where Mellish was killed. He proposed to ambush his party halfway down the cañon, at a convenient turn in the road. The O'Connors, like mountain goats, would look for danger from below, not above. Taken by surprise, they would surrender quietly.

"Tom, you'll watch out for the lady."

But Tom grumbled. "I'm too small a man. Let

Miss Damaris stan' behind Anton. Ther's not a bullet kin reach her then. I don't want a back seat."

Damaris threw oil upon the waters by promising to run no risk.

"I wouldn't deprive Mr. Mudgit," said she, "of a man's privilege of fighting. I will take the back seat. Give him a front one."

Then they mounted, and breasted the steep hill that lay between them and Ireland. The fog had lifted, and a new moon silvered the landscape. From the summit Damaris could look down upon the masses of fog in the valleys. Beneath the stars she seemed to breathe a purer air, less earthy. Smothered in dank mist, her hopes, like her hair, had lost elasticity—the curl was out of both. As they paused for a minute she inhaled gratefully the odours of the night—the rosin from the pines, the perfume of moonflowers, the fragrance of herbs.

"What a nice place this would be," observed Mr. Mudgit, who was no sentimentalist, "if it were not for them Irish."

They pushed on at a lope. The next halt would be called in the cañon.

"No talking, please," said Cassidy, "and keep your eyes peeled for loose rocks. A big boulder crashin' down the cañon would make them O'Connors jump, and we don't want 'em to jump yet."

At the head of the divide, where the San Julian creek bubbled out of the limestone, the horses were tethered. Damaris was urged to remain with them,

but she refused, reiterating her promise to lie low. There was no time to argue with a wilful woman.

When they came to the cross roads, treading silently, and straining eyes and ears, one of the men pointed significantly to the spot where Mellish had fallen. Damaris turned aside and shuddered. Two hundred yards beyond was the coign of vantage. This also was reached, and Cassidy disposed of his little force with a skill begotten of experience. At a given signal from him each man would take his place in the road.

"I'll do the talkin'," said the sheriff.

Twenty minutes passed slowly. Then the quick ear of the greaser caught a vagabond sound floating up out of the fog below.

"They're coming," he whispered.

Damaris wondered why he should register vibrations too subtle for her ear, but stifled jealousy with the reflection that his mother was an Indian. The men, meantime, had quietly taken their pistols from the belts. Cassidy carried a rifle. Tom Mudgit squinted eagerly along the barrel of his big Smith and Wesson.

"It's plaguey dark," he muttered.

The moon took pity upon him, and peered round a rack of mist.

"That's better," said Tom. "I like to see my sights. By Jing! I kin hear 'em now."

Damaris was uncomfortably aware of a palpitating heart. Standing in the shadow of a jutting rock, she could hear distinctly the quick thud of that

unruly organ, and hoped vaguely that the noise would not disturb the men. Fear, she had often heard, was more infectious than measles, and fear had her by the throat. Yet she was glad she had come. Soon she could distinguish voices; a brutal laugh pealed out, a curse or two followed, and the crack of a bull-snake whip.

"That was Tim O'Connor's laugh," whispered the sheriff. "If it comes to shooting, boys, leave him to me."

Very slowly the spring waggon creaked up the stony road. It was a sharp ascent, and the horses had travelled fast. Once more the whip cracked like a pistol shot.

"They're in a hurry," murmured Tom. "It's kind of 'em not to keep us waitin'."

When the team came into sight Cassidy reported the order of their advance. There were two horsemen in the van, two in the rear, and between these the spring waggon, driven doubtless by the elder O'Connor. His three sons and a friend, Patrick Donovan, were in the saddle. Donovan was mocking the gagged man.

"Shure," said he, "ye'll be tired wid this long dhrive. It's a joltin' cyar this ould spring waggon, but we'll make yure honour aisy in foive minutes. Be gob! Mike Mellish 'll be glad to see yez. It's could comfort dyin' by yer lone. Take off the gag, Con, an' let his honour spake his last spache."

"Now!" said Cassidy.

They leaped to their places, and the sheriff's hard voice re-echoed down the cañon.

"Hold up your hands!"

But he was not obeyed. The men confronting him were reckless with hate and whisky.

"Shoot, boys," said the father, discharging his own weapon.

"Ay, shoot!" yelled Cassidy.

Damaris upon her knees prayed fervently to the God of battles. Above the snapping of the pistols was the sharp crack of Cassidy's Winchester. Would it never end? And how could Chillingworth escape this deadly cross-fire?

"Don't spare one o' the devil's brood!"

She recognized the sheriff's voice, harsh but shrill, the voice of a man in mortal agony. A few more shots. Then silence! She reeled from behind the rock, and ran forward, calling her lover by name. No answer! Tom Mudgit seized her arm.

"For God's sake, miss, go back!"

She broke from him, crying, "Where is he? Where is he?"

A shout came from Anton. "He is alive and unhurt."

Then she fainted.

When she recovered consciousness, Chillingworth was bending over her. He had carried the girl more than a hundred yards, and his face was flushed and quivering with the effort.

"How did you escape?" she gasped, leaning against his shoulder.

"They overpowered me in my office. I was tied hand and foot, and gagged; but, at the critical moment, I managed to roll backwards out of the waggon. My back is badly bruised; that's all."

"And the others?"

"Cassidy is dead and one other of his men. Donovan turned tail. Not a single O'Connor has escaped!"

"What a calamity!" she wailed. "What a calamity!"

"Yes," he answered, with sombre emphasis, "a calamity indeed. What will Fabian say? We shall be gibbeted by the press."

The girl looked curiously into his stern face. "Oh, Will," she murmured, "I was thinking of Norah and the dead."

"It may sound heartless to you, Damaris, but I was thinking of the living—of you and me. This night's work may undo four years' hard work."

She sighed, but made no reply. Then she caught sight of his left hand and uttered a low cry.

"Your ring—the emerald ring?"

"They robbed me of it. Donovan has it."

CHAPTER V.

SPECULATIONS.

MR. HENRY JAMES says that the simplest division it is possible to make of the human race is into people who take things hard and people who take things easy.

To the latter class belonged Dennis Fabian. But his ease was the ease of the Roman singer. Here was a man incomparably cool, calm, and masterful, whose blood, abounding in red corpuscles, flowed leisurely in ample veins, whose pulse and impulse throbbed in rhythmic obedience to the owner's will and the dictates of policy. His dignity found expression in his clothes—the clothes of a patrician, well-cut, carefully brushed, and carefully put on. Even his shoes told an artless tale of pliancy and vanity. With no meretricious glare of varnish they quietly proclaimed their superiority to all home-made boots. An impudent clerk had once voiced his suspicions on the subject of corns. This foolish youth is to-day working on a fruit farm.

Fabian came to California in the early fifties, bringing good money in his pockets and good blood

in his veins. Others turned their attention to mining, and, later, to the construction of railroads; but Fabian bought real estate, acres fat and lean, *vara* lots, sand-dunes north, south, east, and west, till the day dawned when he was able to boast that he could ride six hundred miles and sleep each night beneath his own roof-tree and upon his own land!

Upon a morning of the week succeeding the disaster in Calamity Cañon, Fabian was sitting alone in his library—not the room where the reader first met him, but another, larger and more magnificently appointed. Fabian no longer lived upon Rincon Hill. He had bought, in 1875, a block of land on California Street, adjoining the palace of his friend, Rufus Barrington, and had built upon it an ugly brown-stone house, solid, square, and imposing—the house of a man who loved luxury and comfort, but despised mere outward show.

He was reading the morning paper, and reading it between the lines. Observation of the nicest, most critical kind was his pastime. Early in life he had assimilated the fact that sound conclusions are founded upon the things that are unsaid and unwritten. In this spirit he read carefully the leading editorial in which his name was conspicuously absent yet present. The article was able, caustic, witty, and aggressive; but it displayed personal animus, a quality which interferes with digestion. The paragraphs bristled with facts, but the facts were discoloured by prejudice and malice. Noting

this, Fabian smiled, and the lines upon his high, retreating brow faded away.

"He tells all he knows," he muttered, "and that is not much."

Still smiling, he consulted his diary, a thicker volume than the one he used in 1865. Under the head of disbursements was an item upon which his glance lingered. It represented a goodly sum paid in gold coin to the writer of the article he had just read. This gentleman had bled Mr. Fabian freely, but a vampire's thirst for blood is unquenchable.

"I want money," he had said, when the press dispatches made public the slaughter in Ireland.

"Indeed! How much?"

"I leave that to your generosity."

"Which you have strained of late, sir."

"It's not very elastic. I must have money."

"A dollar or two?"

"No; money."

"I admire your impudence," Fabian had replied, in his chilling tones. "Not another cent, sir, do you get from me."

The bat blinked, flapped his wings, and flew down town. Such beasts are not to be pinched with impunity. The creature distilled venom, and mixed it with printer's ink.

"I thought," mused the great man, "that the fellow knew more."

As he chuckled blandly to himself, a manservant presented a card. Fabian glanced at it and nodded.

"You can show Mr. Chillingworth in here. And,

James, bring some cigars, those Carolinas that Mr. Barrington gave me."

He had time to glance at himself in a mirror, and smooth out a wrinkle before Chillingworth entered. The men shook hands, and exchanged keen glances.

"You smoke?" said Fabian. "Glad to hear it. A cigar promotes good feeling between enemies—how much more so between friends! We have never met, but I count you a friend."

Chillingworth was too confounded to reply. Summoned in hot haste, he had expected censure, displeasure, perhaps dismissal. Fabian marked the lawyer's flush of surprise.

"You will find these capital cigars," he continued, lighting one with much deliberation. "Rufus Barrington gave them to me. There is not a better judge of tobacco, or of wine, or of *men* upon this coast."

"I thought there was one exception," said Chillingworth. The smiles of the land baron gave him confidence.

"You must meet him and other friends of mine. Well, sir, San Lorenzo county is getting some free advertising—eh? Your picture in the *Herald* ought to be worth something to you. It hardly does you justice though! You must dine with me to-night at the Pacific Club. You have no other engagement? Good. And now—business! What are your plans? Speak out your mind."

"The press——"

"I anticipate what you would say. The press be hanged!"

"In my own county I have been severely criticized."

"Pooh! You're a lucky fellow. You have a golden nest-egg of notoriety. Let the goose that laid it cackle."

"If you are satisfied, I——"

"Do I look dissatisfied? Go on. A friend of mine told me that you were the most fluent talker south of San Francisco."

Chillingworth accepted the challenge, and spoke out, fully, but concisely. Fabian smoked in silence.

"There are immense opportunities. I don't exaggerate when I say that San Lorenzo is the banner county of the hour, and not a soul knows it. It's an epitome of the state, but as yet a sealed book. There are mines, Mr. Fabian, of gold, silver, quick-silver, coal, and asphaltum. All citrus and deciduous fruits grow to perfection. I know of a small valley which is raising the biggest pumpkins, cabbages and onions in the world. Land that will produce wheat and other cereals is being pastured to death by sheep, and can be bought for a song! I venture to prophesy that within five years these same lands, worth to-day a couple of dollars per acre, will fetch twenty and thirty."

Chillingworth spoke for several minutes in this strain, and his enthusiasm and personal magnetism had their effect upon his listener; but when the lawyer had finished, Fabian said quietly—

"You don't surprise me."

"What! You knew it?"

"I guessed it."

"Ah!"

"California," said Fabian, slowly, "is being well-boomed in Europe and the East. We may confidently expect a big demand for such lands as you describe. Are you prepared to abandon your law business, and work with me, heart and soul? You needn't answer. Ambition has branded you, my friend. I know the stamp. You can give me what I've been looking for—a strong, clever man's undivided energies. You are single?"

"I'm about to be married."

"I cannot congratulate you."

"You do not know the lady, sir," said Chillingworth, warmly.

Then he suddenly remembered that this was the uncle of Damaris. Fabian was stroking his grizzled moustache and frowning.

"My wife," said Chillingworth, after a pause, "will be a help to me."

"An *ex parte* statement. We will see. I'm not sanguine upon the subject. Frankly, I am disappointed."

"You can withdraw your offer, sir."

"I like your pride. No, no—we must pull together; but I'm afraid of petticoats in a boat. Will you be prepared to meet me in my office this afternoon? I've maps there and papers bearing upon our plans. And I shall submit a cut-and-

dried proposition that I think will surprise you. Shall we say three o'clock? Very good. By the way, you will meet my son at dinner. Draw him out, if you can. I may send him to Ireland."

"It's Ireland no longer, Mr. Fabian."

He trudged briskly down Nob Hill, well satisfied with his visit. The great man had impressed him, but not overwhelmingly; the lion's roar had been sweet as the coo of a sucking dove. He felt akin to the king of beasts, and assumed unconsciously a royal port. The vapours of early morning were dispersed; the icicles of remorse and regret had melted; a genial warmth pervaded soul and body. Passing the store of a famous jeweller, he remembered that Damaris had no engagement ring. He entered the shop, and, by reason of his tall, erect figure and fine head, challenged the attention of the chief clerk. Rings? Yes, an immense line. Chillingworth was led to a show-case, and politely requested to name his price. He hesitated. Then, with a frank smile, he confessed his ignorance, and placed himself in the clerk's hands.

"Your name," said he, "is a guarantee of fair dealing. I want an engagement ring. It's a thing that a man only buys once in his life, and I'm tempted to be extravagant."

The clerk's sympathies were at once enlisted. He was a man of years, who had not forgotten his youth.

A diamond and pearl ring was selected and paid for. It cost nearly three hundred dollars! An impecunious lawyer with no bank to draw on save

the bank of time might have hesitated; not so Chillingworth. Nothing, he decided, was too good for his future wife. A necklace tempted him, but he fled, laughingly assuring the clerk that he would see his face again, and soon.

He lunched at the Acropolis restaurant, the most expensive in San Francisco. A sense of what was fitting constrained him to order oysters, some sweet-breads and peas, and a pint of Chablis. Divine service upon Sundays begets an amazing appetite, and Chillingworth, after spending the morning before the shrine of Plutus, ate heartily, savouring the delicate fare, and reflecting upon the change in his fortunes. The bill, like the ring, was out of all proportion to his means, but he paid it gladly, and feed the waiter handsomely. The golden promise of the future discounted the extravagance of the present. In the same spirit he smoked a twenty-five cent cigar, and confessed that, in the crude condition of his palate, he was not getting value received. Cigars at three for a quarter were good enough *for him!* What a humiliating fact!

When he met Fabian his blood was flowing freely in hands and feet. At the first interview with the great man his extremities had been cold; the brain had required an extra allowance of heat.

"I've changed our plans for to-night," said his host, as he ushered the lawyer into his private office. "My daughter Joan insists that we dine at home. I always let my children have their own way, so I hope that you will make no objections.

And I can give you a better bottle of wine than we could get at the club."

Chillingworth murmured his acceptance as he sat down.

"A quiet dinner," said Mr. Fabian; "just ourselves and a friend of my son's."

A minute later they were knee-deep in work, and for an hour question and answer flashed to and fro. Chillingworth's amazing mastery of detail shone conspicuous throughout the dialogue, provoking the compliments of his chief.

"Upon my soul," he said, "you put me to the blush. I thought I knew something of Southern California, but you have had access to sources of information that I had overlooked. Now, sir, give me your closest attention."

He laid down a pencil, and looked fixedly into the lawyer's keen eyes. Chillingworth returned the glance.

"I propose," began Fabian, "to take advantage of what you have told me. I liked your expression this morning, the banner county of the hour. A flag is a conspicuous object in a landscape, but a man with his eyes glued to the ground can't see it. The silurians living in your cow-county are blind, like the crustaceans in the Kentucky caves. Foresight has been atrophied. Now then, you cannot move mountains without a lever—money. And to carry out your schemes will take a——"

"Hundred thousand dollars in spot cash," said Chillingworth.

“An underestimate.”

“I think not, sir.”

“I concede the point; it is immaterial. The point is, I must furnish the coin. You will do the work. And to adjust, satisfactorily, the rival claims of labour and capital is not easy. You must sacrifice your law business. What is it worth a month? About two hundred and fifty dollars, eh? Shall we take that, then, as a basis of remuneration? I agree to pay you that sum monthly, in advance, and ten per cent. upon all sales.”

“You are generous, sir.”

“I think so, but I want your undivided energies. And this marriage of yours should be postponed for a year. I don't insist. I speak in our joint interest. In the interests, also, of the lady. A young wife requires attention—plenty of it. She cannot be neglected with impunity. I tell you, sir, that marriage to a man in your position is a serious blunder. Wait! A year hence, if the tide serves, I shall be prepared to take you into partnership, so far as the San Lorenzo lands are concerned. My proposition applies mainly to the San Julian. But”—he spoke with emphasis—“you will be empowered by me to buy options upon all those Spanish grants you speak of, embracing in the aggregate nearly three hundred thousand acres of land. If the San Julian sells, as you say it will, like hot cakes, your share alone of the profits will be at least one hundred thousand dollars. With that as a nest-egg, an ambitious man can afford to take a wife,

but not with less. In five years' time, Mr. Chillingworth, you will be worth your million!"

Chillingworth's head, at the recital of these figures, was like Prospero's island, full of noises. His thoughts outbuzzed a swarm of bees.

"My marriage, sir, must take place. The day is fixed."

"I regret the necessity, but it's your affair," said Fabian, coldly. "You are too clever a man not to be aware of the task ahead of you. To compass success you must work all day and scheme all night. No man can serve two masters, and a wife you will find is an American's master. They manage these things better in Europe." He laughed cynically, and continued—"At any rate, you will please secure these options before the ceremony, and the honeymoon, I would suggest, should not exceed ten days. Of course, you and your wife will occupy the old San Julian *adobe*. My title to the homestead was never questioned, and the house, I believe, is in fair condition. You will superintend in person the surveying and subdividing of the lands. To-morrow our contract in duplicate shall be signed by both of us. Remember, we dine at seven-thirty."

When Chillingworth found himself alone in Market Street, he attempted to marshal his thoughts, and failed. A million! Fabian talked of a million as if it were a plum to be had for the plucking. And a partnership! It was pleasant to dance to such piping as this.

"My sakes!" said a voice, "you ain't a runnin' a foot-race."

It was Flint, who had accompanied him to the city. He had told all fellow-passengers that he was "short" on caskets. This jocularity upon a subject that rasped his heart had disgusted the lawyer.

"Oh, it's you!" he said contemptuously. Flint had never seemed so small.

"Yes, it's me," piped the undertaker. "I thought I'd ask ye to eat supper with me. Reely now, I feel under obligations to——"

"Thank you," said Chillingworth, curtly. "I dine to-night with Mr. Fabian."

"Jee—whiz! With Dennis Fabian! At a restyront?"

"At his own house."

"You don't say. Where are you stopping, Mr. Chillingworth?"

The lawyer noted with amusement that Flint had assumed his professional tone, respect fertilized by a ghoulish avarice.

"At the Acropolis."

"I always have said," murmured the little man, "that you was destined to get there. 'He'll get there,' I've said time and time again; 'he'll get there!'"

Where the lawyer was destined to arrive was left to the imagination. Curiously enough, Chillingworth, who knew Flint as he knew the shape of the Bishop's peak, was flattered by this short-legged sycophant.

"Yes," he said graciously; "I think, Flint, that I shall get there."

They parted company at the next turning, and Chillingworth returned to the Acropolis. He had a question to ask of the chief clerk, a personage known to most travellers as Count Jones. From this gentleman—a gold-mine of information—he learned the name and address of a fashionable hosier, who might be trusted to supply customers with the very latest importations. In San Lorenzo dress suits were never worn, but Chillingworth, with his usual foresight, had bought one within the year. Minor accessories, however, were lacking. At the establishment recommended by Count Jones, he entreated courteously the advice of the presiding genius, whose clipped aspirates betrayed the cockney. He was assured, much to his surprise, that made-up ties were not the correct thing, and that dress shirts lavishly embroidered branded the wearer as a Boeotian.

"I've not given these small matters attention," he said, as he paid a bill unwarrantably large.

"They are not unimportant," replied the *arbiter elegantiarum*; "such details are evidence of a gentleman's standing in society."

"Yes," said Chillingworth, interrogatively. "Well, in America we are not so particular."

"I beg your pardon, sir. The best people here"—he laid an emphasis upon the superlative, not wasted upon the lawyer—"are more particular than in the West End of London."

"I've plenty to learn," thought Chillingworth, "and, apparently, plenty to unlearn."

* * * * *

Punctually at half-past seven he ascended the red granite steps of Fabian's house, and was received by two servants. He glanced at his reflection in a pier-glass before he followed the butler into the inner hall. What he saw was a tall, handsome man, slightly flushed—a reassuring vision. As the doors were flung open, he heard a buzz of unintelligible chatter, succeeded by a silence as his name was proclaimed. Fabian welcomed him, and turned to two men standing upon the hearthrug.

"My son, Reginald," he said, with a wave of his hand, "and the Prince Paolo Casanegra. My daughter, Joan, is late as usual."

The prince, a lean, pallid Roman, bowed formally; Reginald Fabian lounged forward and extended his hand.

"It's a pleasure," he said, "to see you in the flesh, Mr. Chillingworth. My congratulations upon your miraculous escape from those miscreants."

"Thank you," said Chillingworth, stiffly. "You are very kind."

The son resumed a conversation in French with the prince, as Fabian claimed the attention of his guest, who lent but a dull ear to polished periods. The provincial was fascinated by the luxury and beauty of the room.

"Ah," exclaimed Fabian, "here she is at last!

My dear Joan, this is Mr. Chillingworth, who has already kindled your interest."

The girl paused, bowed, sparkled with smiles, and glided on. Chillingworth, following her resplendent figure with admiring eyes, saw the Roman step forward and kiss her hand.

"*Vénus Victria,*" he murmured. "*Je vous salue!*"

This was Greek to the man from San Lorenzo, but he interpreted aright the language blazing in the black eyes of the Roman. Joan Fabian was then in her twenty-first year, a woman upon whom the glances of all men, gentle and simple, lingered with delight, an epitome of beauty, charm, and audacity. She wore her favourite colour—green (since appropriated by the *décadents*), which lent a sleek lustre to her white skin and red-gold hair. Her eyes matched the dress, in tints stolen from the sea; and her lips, sensuous in their curves, were the lips of a Bacchante. She was taller than the Italian by half an inch, and finely proportioned. Chillingworth stared open-mouthed at the goddess.

He sat next her at dinner, but the prince, upon the left, monopolized the talk, and Chillingworth listened enviously to the easy flow of his periods. Casanegra, educated in England, spoke English fluently, and his accent and gestures gave a certain piquancy to his anecdotes. Both Reginald and his sister, having passed the previous winter in Rome, caught the quips and quirks of the prince's wit without difficulty.

"Your Cosmopolis," said Joan, "is a wonderful place, but I should be sorry to live there."

Casanegra frowned and laughed. "Is it indiscreet to ask why?"

"The eternal city," she replied carelessly, "does not please me. I prefer London, Paris, New York."

"And, possibly, San Francisco?"

"No, not San Francisco. It is too like Rome."

A chorus of remonstrance, in which Chillingworth joined, provoked explanations.

"A woman," said Joan, smiling, "likes to use her tongue, but in Rome that precious privilege is denied her. You blacks are so very sensitive, and the others are quite as touchy. It's compromising to laugh sometimes. And here one is pestered by conventionality. We are continually asking ourselves—Shall we recognize this woman or that, whose husband or father drove a hack in early days, or sold *tamales*, or kept a corner grocery? We are not sure of our own social status, and, in consequence, mistrust that of our neighbours. And here, as in Rome, we are slaves to the most indecent gossip. We know each other too intimately. Confess, Don Paolo, that I am right."

"I should like to know you intimately," he said softly; and the others laughed.

"Joan is right," said Dennis Fabian. "I've been tempted more than once to leave California and pitch my tent on Fifth Avenue. I was born in the East, and to the East I shall return."

"And what do you say to that, Mr. Chillingworth?" murmured Joan.

She had purposely given him time to collect his wits, divining that he was somewhat ill at ease. His fine physique captivated her eye, and she wondered if mind matched body. Her father had instructed her to draw him out, to probe his weakness, for the cynic well knew that a strong man may be a sealed book, of which woman holds the key. Chillingworth's appearance surprised her. His dress, deportment, and voice proclaimed the gentleman.

"I am sorry to see rich men leaving the state," he answered soberly; "but, as a business proposition, I can understand that the East gives more amusement in return for the dollar than the West."

"A man with a sense of humour might take issue with you," said Reginald.

"Ah, you laugh at us," retorted the lawyer; "but you must admit that in return we laugh at you. California is very democratic, and the native son of the golden West is a composite creature, an amalgam of what is best and worst in older civilizations. I hope to be the means," he continued quietly, "of inducing immigration to this state; but my efforts will be seriously handicapped if our best citizens leave us."

"Are you connected with the Boston Chillingworths?" said Reginald, who had listened attentively to this clear-voiced stranger.

"Yes; my father was a cousin of Harold Chillingworth, the head of the family, but I've never seen

him. I came here when I was fourteen, and I've not had a month's holiday in twenty years."

"There's a reason for everything," said Reginald. "The law which drives away a certain class is fundamental. With liberty to choose, I and my friends prefer a country where we can do as we please. In California we have a democracy, triumphant in its ignorance, illiteracy, and conceit. If a thing isn't Californian, it doesn't go down. The papers jump upon me because I wear riding-breeches and keep a groom in livery. Time, of course, will change public opinion; but till it does, I shall remain in the East or in Europe. The men who pioneered came to the state with one object, to make their pile and go home; and this lust of the dollar has stamped itself upon the second generation. Only the few can succeed, and the many are miserable."

Fabian caught Casanegra's eye, and smiled.

"My son, prince," he said dryly, "is very young. But"—he paused, and looked directly at Chillingworth—"he is right in one respect. Out of a thousand men one, perhaps, has the money-making gift; the others cannot compete with him in chasing the dollar, and are fools to try. That has been and is the curse of this country. But democracy does not rule, Reginald. The men who built up this city were my personal friends. Amongst them you can count Rufus Barrington, Brown Mavis, and others too numerous to mention, the salt of the earth. These formed an oligarchy. You may prate as you

please of majorities, but the few rule, and in early days they ruled well and wisely. But the rabble that flocked here in their footsteps have pulled down what we built up. And what the outcome will be none can say. I prefer not to guess. The present is with us, and we must concern ourselves with that. How do you like that Clicquot, prince?"

Casanegra began to talk of vintages, and Joan turned to Chillingworth.

"Tell me," she murmured, "what *you* think. Have you really worked for twenty years without a holiday?"

"For twenty years," he repeated gravely. "You can conceive, perhaps, what failure would mean to me now. What I think about California, Miss Fabian, is not worth mentioning. I've been too busy to think at all, too busy to read, too busy to study the art of small talk. Your brother has the theories of life at his tongue's tip; I have the practice. But"—he smiled into her eyes—"I would not exchange with him."

"You must show me your hand after dinner. I'll tell you your fortune. Don't look so superior! I can assure you that I possess mystic powers of divination. Are you fond of music? You are. Then, you shall hear me sing. It's the only thing I do well. Garcia taught me."

"You have spent many years abroad?"

"The last three."

His glance fell upon her dress.

"Worth," she said softly. "Do you think it pretty?"

"Very pretty. I have never seen so many pretty things before."

His eyes wandered from her dress to the appointments of the table—the shaded candles, the flowers, the exquisite glass, silver, and china. The room was panelled in ivory white, and the hangings were a pale sea-green. Then he looked once more at her dress.

"Green is my favourite colour," she observed, reading his thoughts. "But you must not infer that I'm like Reginald, in my salad days."

Chillingworth slightly flushed. Certainly, he reflected, the glances of the goddess were discomposing. Was she a sorceress, this blonde Venus with alluring eyes? He had never met such a woman.

"I believe," she murmured, in a voice soft as velvet, "that we shall be friends."

"Why do you say that? Friendship implies fellowship, intimacy, similar tastes; so far as I can see, we have nothing in common."

"Is not flesh and blood enough?"

"Sometimes too much. Yes, we have that."

"I've firm faith in first impressions. When I came into the hall, I said to myself— No; what I said was of no consequence." She sipped her wine, and turned aside her head.

"Tell me," he whispered. "No man could possibly be indifferent to your opinion of him."

"I'll tell you some day," she answered lightly—"not now."

She changed the subject, and asked a score of questions about his life in Southern California. Chillingworth, who had drunk more wine than usual, and was conscious of mental exhilaration, talked his best, and told some capital stories. The girl's laughter silenced the other men, who listened with curiosity to a provincial's experiences. Reginald and Casanegra proposed to visit San Lorenzo. Was there a house on the San Julian? Yes, Mr. Fabian believed that the old *adobe* was still in remarkable preservation. Sport? Certainly. Sea-fishing for yellow-tail, *bonito*, and salmon, and brooks full of trout. In the summer and fall, he could promise the young men deer, quail, snipe, and all kinds of ducks.

"I'll keep house for you," said Joan.

"Let us go," exclaimed Casanegra, with enthusiasm. "You will lend us your *adobe*, Mr. Fabian, and your daughter?"

"My daughter," said the great man, "does what she likes. I believe I'm a well-trained American father; I never interfere with my children's whims. Go by all means, if it pleases you. As for Reginald, he might do worse than give my affairs some of his attention. I shall keep out of Ireland myself. I'm proof against most things, but not bullets."

"It is settled then," said Joan, as she rose from the table. "We will visit Ireland, and catch fish. I like to fish."

"Take care that she doesn't hook you, Casanegra,"

said Reginald, with a laugh, as the door closed behind his sister.

"I'm hooked already," replied the Roman.

After cigars and coffee, the men strolled into the drawing-room, and Joan sang half a dozen songs, Italian, French, and English. Chillingworth marked with impatience the attentions of the Roman, and decided that he was certainly hooked. Casanegra's father owned a big gloomy palace in Rome and a castle in the Campagna, but the heir was small, yellow, a Catholic, and—so rumour said—heavily in debt. Joan, of course, would marry him. But what a pity! He noted, with resentment, that the young prince's eyes were set curiously deep in his narrow head, and that his finger-tips were stained with nicotine. A cigarette fiend, no doubt, and dissipated, like all princes. The lawyer had the prejudices of a Protestant, an Anglo-Saxon, and a republican.

Before he took his leave, he enjoyed five minutes' talk with the beauty. She insisted upon seeing the palm of his left hand, and interpreted the deep, sanguine lines.

"You have the hand of a strong man," she said, with emphasis, "and the lines of the typical American who succeeds in everything he undertakes." She paused and laughed. "Not everything," she continued softly. "In love's lists you will encounter defeat. Well, a man can't expect to win the earth and all things thereon! Your line of destiny ends in Jupiter's mount. Let me see the

right hand. Ahem! Here it wanders, irregularly, mark you, into Saturn's territory. Your ambition will receive some buffets. Your hands corroborate your face, Mr. Chillingworth. You know, of course, that one eyebrow is slightly out of the straight line, one nostril a thought fuller and cleaner cut than the other; the upper lip, too, has the spiritual curve, the lower the fleshly shape and tint. I'm brutally frank, am I not? Now, compare the right and left hands. In the left, head is stronger than heart; in the right, *vice versa*. In the left, I read extraordinary energy and singleness of purpose; in the right, vacillation and human weakness. I can promise you health and wealth, not happiness."

"Miss Fabian, you don't believe really in chiromancy?"

"Indeed, I do. Science sneers at such arts, but tells us that everything has significance and use. Why not the lines upon the hand? My father says you are about to marry. I should like to see your future wife."

"To warn her?"

"Perhaps."

As he walked back to the Acropolis, he was very sensible of a change in his point of view. The desirability of material things assumed altogether new proportions. The man was receptive as well as perceptive, and he had assimilated without effort the sights and sounds of a memorable evening. But with all his acuteness, he never suspected that his host had deliberately set a trap for him, into

which he had tumbled headlong. Fabian had the genius of Talleyrand for intrigue. He, too, liked to fish, and was a past master of the gentle craft. He had baited his hook to-night with all that appeals to the senses, and had landed a king salmon.

Before Chillingworth went to bed he wrote a long letter to Damaris.

"MY DEAREST LITTLE WOMAN,

"You will be delighted to hear that I have seen the great man and have sunned myself in his smiles. I looked, as you know, for censure and frowns, I encountered compliments and an invitation to dine at his house. This means much—how much I dare not say. Indeed, the rosy future cannot be set down in crude black ink. I can hint, however, at a million! *That* is Fabian's own estimate of my share of the profits at the end of five years. And Fabian is a conservative man. He has spoken of a partnership. Not a word of this, darling, to a living soul. It spells, of course, recognition—of me and my work. You know that I have worked. To-night I met at dinner this Roman prince, whose picture was in the papers, and his friend Reginald Fabian. The young man I don't like at all. He sneers at honest Americans and hard work. The prince said very little. He is a fortune-hunter, of course.

"The luxury of Fabian's house beggars description. I can understand at last the value of money. If anything could have spurred me on to greater efforts, this glimpse of Dives at home has done it. The dinner was——" Here follows a description of fleshpots that may be omitted.

"I shall spend three days here. There are a thousand details that demand personal attention, the arrangements

with surveyors, etc. I've outlined a plan for puffing our lands, which has Fabian's enthusiastic approval.

"He objects to our marriage, but I have waited for you long enough. I assured him that I would give our joint interests my undivided energies. He said that you would not submit to that. How much he knows of my little woman! Of course, my sweet one, I can count upon your common sense. We must spend at least three months or more on the San Julian. Most of that time I shall be with the surveyors. Then the selling of lands will follow. Not a man must slip through my fingers. My time will be entirely taken up for at least a year; but think of the million! You will agree that pleasure must curtsy to business.

"It's midnight and I must close.

"Always your devoted lover,

"WILLIAM CHILLINGWORTH.

"P.S.—I bought you a ring to-day—a diamond and pearl, side by side. It's very pretty, but a small thing to what I hope to give my wife."

This letter duly travelled to San Lorenzo, and was read by Damaris.

"He loves me," she whispered, "but——"

The sentence was completed with a sigh.

CHAPTER VI.

WHICH CONTAINS A MORAL.

UPON his return from San Francisco, Chillingworth found Damaris in the *emparado*. The girl came running to greet him, sun-set flushed and happy, with the fragrance of roses upon her person and the bloom of spring upon her face. In the cool shadows of evening she looked infinitely bewitching—a nymph of Arcadia, seductive, desirable, irresistible. The stillness of the air held captive rural scents and sounds. In the meadows beyond the vineyard the barley-hay, lush with sap, was lying in long rows, distilling a languorous perfume of maturity; and, across the creek, babbling its idle way to the ocean from the corral of a Portuguese dairyman, came the melodic plash of milk streaming from full udders, the odours of kine, and the plaintive cries of weaned calves.

To Chillingworth, weary with travel—he had taken the stage from Soledad—and mentally exhausted by the excitement of the past week, the scene was idyllic. Standing beneath the vine leaves, he held Damaris in his arms and kissed her fair

face, noting amorously the exquisite blushes which glowed beneath his lips.

"Why, Damaris!" he exclaimed. "You are changed in one short week. This"—he kissed her again—"is not a girl, but a woman."

She was sensible of a change, and smiled assent. "Is my lord pleased?"

"Enchanted! The mere sight of you, my sweet witch, would thrill a statue, and I am flesh and blood. But, Damaris, I am changed, too, since we parted. To me, also, life has grown fuller, more desirable, more dramatic. I've been successful beyond my maddest hopes. We shall be rich, dearest—rich. The golden apples are within reach."

"Are riches so desirable?" she murmured, as they passed from the *emparedo*, and sauntered hand in hand on to the lawn.

"Desirable, you innocent? What a question! Yes, we shall be rich. I shall be able to give my queen her dues—her robes of state, her jewels, her castle."

"She only asks for love."

He took the engagement ring from his pocket, and held it up to the light.

"It's lovely, lovely—too lovely, you extravagant man! I'm not a queen, only a country girl—almost a beggar-maid."

He placed the ring upon her finger, and whispered his vows.

"Your turn now, Damaris. What have you to say?"

She was silent, oppressed, possibly, by his impassioned phrases. How could she, a virgin, tell the tale of love to this ardent man?

"Will," she replied softly, stroking his broad hand with her cool fingers, "vows are for strong men to make—and to keep if they can—not for weak women. You have all my heart—all—all. It beats for you by night and by day. I am changed—yes; I have put aside childish things. It happened, I think, during that terrible ride. I knew then that, if I lost you, I should have died! I might have lived on to be an old woman, but really I should have been dead, blind to the beauty of earth, deaf to the music of life, dumb to the pleading of what is animate and inanimate. You know best, Will, whether it is so with you."

He turned aside his head. They were sitting side by side beneath a weeping-willow planted by the hand of the parson.

"You needn't answer," she whispered. "It is not so with men. It could not be so. I don't deceive myself, Will."

She spoke calmly, but with conviction. Chillingworth was too honest to lie.

"You are right," said he; and the girl marked a queer quaver in his voice. "A man cannot meet a maid upon equal terms. The world and the flesh exact too much from the male. You asked me, dearest, upon the night we became engaged, a question which I answered truthfully. I am not a good man, but I am a good fellow, honest and

sincere. I cannot give you what you give me, a pure, perfect love. Between us is a gulf that may be spanned by regret, but not by words. But"—he pressed her small, soft body to his—"but, my sweet, the present and future are mine; and may God deal with me as I deal by you!"

At supper Mrs. Fish gossiped as usual. Pat Donovan, it appeared, was still at large; somewhere, it was supposed, in the hills of Ireland.

"He has my ring with him," said Chillingworth. "I don't care whether the ruffian is caught or not, but I want that ring."

"I hope he will keep it," said Damaris.

The lawyer rallied her upon her obstinacy and superstition.

"It's wicked," said Mrs. Fish, "to believe in such nonsense. Rings, indeed! Well, I never was superstitious—*never*. Now, there's Miss Popper, she wouldn't cut a garment Friday forenoon for a thousand dollars, and she's a church member! And Mrs. Skenk was saying not a week ago that Josiah Flint had met old man O'Connor and had shaken his hand *before breakfast* on the day he was shot down. It is sinful, as well as silly, to take stock in such rubbish. I'm particular myself about only one thing. I will not step out of bed left foot first. That I will not do. Speaking of the O'Connors reminds me of Norah. She's disappeared. They do say that the girl is with Patsy Donovan. It seems he was fond of her, but she wouldn't look at him. The town's quiet at last, and I do declare that things

seem to have turned out for the best. The Lord's ways are not our ways."

"Oh, mother! Can you believe that all this misery and bloodshed will profit us?"

"I'm inclined to agree with Mrs. Fish," said Chillingworth, slowly. "In the horror of the moment I felt that a curse was on my work, but Fabian does not think so. The publicity has really helped us. We have received about ten thousand dollars' worth of free advertising."

Damaris looked up in amazement at these words. Was this the man who had come white-lipped and trembling to her side upon the day following the death of Mellish? He had seemed then stricken. And now he talked smilingly of advertisements. The girl felt, mentally speaking, as if she had just been tarred and feathered.

Mrs. Fish continued. "We must bow to the will of the Lord. He has smitten the ungodly and the drunken. William Chillingworth, may I send you another slice of ham? I saw to the boiling of it myself—half water and half claret, with peppercorns and cloves; and, Damaris, always let your hams cool in the liquor in which they were boiled. That is important—most important."

"It is certainly an excellent ham," said Chillingworth, passing his plate. "Remember, Damaris, your mother's directions."

"I've a good memory," she replied, "particularly for important things."

After supper the lovers wandered into the

vineyard, and Chillingworth's ardour removed the tar and feathers. Damaris, considering her age—at nineteen most American girls think themselves qualified to speak with authority upon all subjects—was remarkably modest and simple-minded. A man, she reflected, had a certain license of speech. His words were not always to be taken literally. She had seen the heart of this gallant lover laid bare. If it pleased him to cover his wounds with the rags of indifference, that was his affair. She knew the real nature of the injuries received.

In this spirit she accepted his caresses, and abandoned herself to the intoxication of his homage. What maid can resist these? Presently she spoke, diffidently, of her own plans—a course of special study of viticulture and horticulture, the elements at least of geology, and perhaps book-keeping; whatever, in brief, would help her lord, and lighten his labours.

Chillingworth protested. "I can paddle my own canoe, little woman. Give your time to your music and to literature. Miss Fabian could advise you. When she comes down to the San Julian you will talk with her. You'll catch on at once. She's an accomplished woman of the world. Her hints will be valuable."

"Miss Fabian? This is the first time you've mentioned her. And coming here?"

He answered indifferently that he believed such a plan was afoot. Then he described Joan, accurately enough—too accurately, perhaps, for the peace of

mind of Damaris. He dwelt at length upon her taste in dress, her French accent, her singing, and her charming manners.

"You can help me best, my darling, by fitting yourself for the position you will some day be called upon to occupy."

"Position—occupy! Will, what grand words!"

"Not at all. I won't have you bother your dear little head with my affairs. You can play beautifully. Don't drop your practising. I think I'll get you a French maid."

"A French—maid? Are you crazy?"

He answered impatiently, "Why not a French maid? You must learn to chatter French. And she could make over your dresses. Poor Miss Popper is hardly up to date."

"I thought you always admired my dresses. I—I design them myself."

"Why, Damaris, I detect a sniff—a sniff. Dear heart, of course I admire your dresses. They are the prettiest in San Lorenzo, but not *quite*—you know. I want my little wife to have the best of everything. Nothing shall be too good for her."

"When do you expect Miss Fabian?"

"Late in September, if they come at all. You can never depend upon these fashionable folks. They take notions—eh? You and I will have the San Julian ranch house to ourselves for at least three months. By Heaven! how happy we shall be!"

They were quietly married in June, and spent the

honeymoon—ten joyous days—at Monterey. The old, sleepy capital of the Pacific, with its ancient *presidio*, quaint *adobe* houses, its missions and traditions, lends itself admirably to a *solitude à deux*. Here are forests where a love-sick couple may wander unseen for ever, treading silently the softest carpet in all the world, listening, when speech fails them, to the love lilt of the pine-tops wooed by the mighty trade-winds. Or, perhaps, the beach lures them to its lonely shores, lonely save for the sea-fowl—gulls innumerable, cormorants, shags, and sandpipers running nimbly to and fro upon wet, gleaming sands. And the caves must be explored—gloomy caverns where lurks the horrible octopus; and the rocks at low tide surely prick curiosity, for these are the homes of the seals, and beneath the green, red, and purple seaweed may be found hoary mussels, monstrous abalones, and echinoderms bristling with amethystine quills.

During this brief season of rest what was best in Chillingworth found expression—humour, mirth, capacity for enjoyment, and a virile tenderness that transported the bride. His sympathy and consideration were really amazing in a man whose knowledge of women could have been written upon a sheet of note-paper. But the brains that had grappled successfully with the driest technicalities of the law served him less faithfully in the delicate task of interpreting his wife's heart and mind. He did not always please her. His lightness of tone upon certain subjects provoked frowns that he kissed

away, and perplexities not so easily banished. The doctrine of expediency was a bone of contention between them. Into all plans for the future the word "policy" wormed its insidious way.

"Surely," she would say, "this is sophistry. What is right, dearest, is right—what is wrong, is wrong."

"It depends upon time and place, Damaris. There is no ironclad rule. After all, these matters concern me, the breadwinner, not you, my sweet. Who would rob lovely woman of her illusions? Not I, assuredly."

A certain finality of tone alarmed her, but she reflected that the authority of a husband sixteen years her senior was not lightly to be impugned; so she held her peace.

"I've served a tough apprenticeship," he said one day, as they were lying in the warm sand-dunes to the east of the Hôtel del Monte. "I've been obliged to run over people, or to be run over. I drive skittish horses, and don't hold myself responsible if fools get knocked down. And, of course, I've made enemies. I rather glory in that. There was old Slumber. Do you remember Slumber? He was Superior Judge of San Lorenzo in early days, and never forgot that he had sat on the bench. He died ten years ago. Well, Slumber was half fool and half hypocrite, with his ugly head full of texts and tricks. I was attorney for the bank then, and just beginning to make my way. The cashier who employed me was a shrewd, clever fellow, but the president was a hayseed, who had scraped together a small fortune by

practising the most sordid avarice. You remember him, too—Abel Bobo. He knew as much about banking as a horned toad knows about the nebular hypothesis, but he could feed and clothe a large family upon less than a hundred dollars a year. Well, the cashier asked my advice upon a rather delicate subject, involving the foreclosure of a mortgage upon a large property. The cashier, you must understand, had advanced more money than was quite justifiable on this property, and he apprehended awkward questions from the board of directors, and in particular from the president. He begged me to give the matter my attention and, if necessary, consult Slumber, then acting as attorney for the man who owned the property. I did so, believing Slumber to be an honourable man. He knew that I was acting in the interests of his client as well as mine, but what does he do, the fox? He goes to old Bobo with the facts that I had given to him in confidence, and of course there was the devil to pay. It nearly ruined me and the cashier. But we made a combination that defeated Slumber and Bobo, and then——”

He paused and chuckled.

“And then,” said Damaris, “you told the wretch what you thought of him, and——”

“Not much,” said Chillingworth, still chuckling; “not much, my innocent dove! I had that man in my power, and he knew it. Had I quarrelled with him he would have become my open enemy. I treated him as if he were my best friend, and used

him whenever I needed his services—used him, as if he were my chattel!”

He laughed heartily, but Damaris was distressed.

“I wish,” said she, “that you had broken your cane across his face.”

“You bloodthirsty witch! It was policy to pretend.”

“I hate humbug,” she exclaimed passionately; “and the word ‘policy,’ which is so often on your lips, is a synonym of humbug. Never pretend with me, Will! Swear that you will not!”

He looked at her with interest. A woman’s moods, he reflected, even the most tempestuous, were not without charm.

“How your eyes flash,” he said lightly. “No, no, dear Lady Disdain, I’ll not pretend with you. With those I hate—yes; with her I love better than life—never!”

She was but half satisfied with his courtly protestations.

Upon the tenth and last day they visited for the third time the Franciscan Mission of San Carmel, where lie the bones of its founder, the famous *padre*, Junipero Serra. The ancient building is eloquent, even in its ruin, of the pleasant yesterdays—of the mirth, music, romance, and religion of the Spanish Californians. An indefinable charm encompasses these memorials of a past that can never return, a charm not merely of association and tradition, but of environment. The *padres* were men of taste, who selected the sites of their churches

with a trained apprehension of the fitting and the beautiful.

"They have had their day," said Chillingworth, speaking vaguely of the *padres* and their flocks; "now it is our turn. They had immense power, those priests, and opportunities which, to give them their due, they grasped. I respect them for that, although I detest the system. Come—let us go. Why, Damaris, your eyes are wet!"

"Wet with indignation," she retorted. "Are we not always boasting of our wealth, our resources, and our energies? And yet we suffer wind and rain to work havoc upon these holy places! Are we Vandals? Oh, it's a shame!—a blot upon California!"

"How strongly you feel things," he said curiously.

"Yes, Will; I do. You think me girlish—and—and silly? I see that you disapprove; your mouth is quite set, and your eyes have a hard look."

He smiled instantly. "Poor little woman! But, Damaris, if you wax so fierce over small matters, what will you do when it comes to great? You cannot draw cheques with impunity upon your vitality. This excitement takes it out of you, robs you of strength that you may need. You are pale, your lips are trembling. Is it wise to waste your energy fighting shadows?"

"You are right, Will. I suppose I was overwrought by the sense that our holiday was at an end."

"Well," he replied cheerily, "that is true, but it's pleasant to look forward to the work ahead."

"Do you think so—when it means separation?"

"We could not always be together, my darling."

"No," she sighed; "of course not."

They walked in silence for some distance. Then Damaris turned and stretched out her arms. "Good-bye, dear Carmel," she said softly; "you are very old and broken down, but you, too, have had your golden hours. None can rob you of them!"

A few days later they took up their quarters in the old del Pliego *adobe*. The house was in the form of an "H," with a *patio* in front, surrounded on three sides by quaint mission arches, and was situated upon the spur of a hill that sloped gently to the beach. Amongst Californian *adobes* it was famous by reason of its size and antiquity. In early days the del Pliegos were counted great people, who entertained lavishly every person of note who came to the state. The "pathfinder," Fremont, had smoked his cigar upon the *varandal*, and in the *comedor*, the long dining-room, Carillo and his supporters had drunk confusion to the revolutionaries, Castro and Alvarado.

By Fabian's orders this ancient house had been kept in tolerable repair, and the gardens, which contained a small orange grove and some fine olive trees, had been for two years in the charge of professional nurserymen. By experiment they had demonstrated to Chillingworth's satisfaction that peaches, apples, pears, and, in particular, apricots, would grow to perfection in the soft, friable loam that covered the foothills of Ireland.

The surveyors, meantime, had not been idle, but

the advent of Chillingworth inspired them to greater efforts. The work of subdivision proceeded apace, and claimed the lawyer's constant attention. From sunrise to sunset he might be seen, astride his horse, now on this ridge, now on that, suggesting, encouraging, directing, always genial, tactful, and never weary. There was much rough land on the San Julian, and the just allotments of valley and hill tasked all his patience and energy. He insisted that the topography of each subdivision should be carefully noted down for his own use.

"I shall sell these lands myself," he told Damaris, who sometimes accompanied him, "and I wish to know exactly what I'm selling. If I tell a customer that there is so much valley upon such and such a lot, I want him to get just that amount. When this work is finished, I'll be able to sit in my office and describe any forty acres out of these eleven leagues, and not make one misstatement. You see, I must satisfy these first settlers. I shall think for them as well as for myself. They *must* be pleased, because their good word, scattered broadcast over America, will bring others."

He never tired of such talk, and Damaris listened amazed at this Titanic energy.

"You really like your work?" she said one day in July, when he had slaved for more than ten hours beneath a tropical sun.

"Like it? Why, of course. It fills my whole life. I—I—mean," he stammered, conscious of a slip, "I m—m—mean, Damaris——"

"What you say," she retorted. "It does fill your life. I suppose that nothing short of this complete engrossment commands success."

"Nothing. The day seems too short to attend to all the details. And the possibilities unfold themselves hour by hour. I thought that I had not let a point escape me, but only yesterday I determined to establish my office at the ranch house. There is Port San Julian, not a mile away. Our clients, upon leaving the steamer, will come straight to me. They won't come into contact at all with those moss-backs in San Lorenzo. I shall take them out, show them the land, and strike while the iron is hot—sign, seal, and deliver!"

"Smacks of highway robbery that last phrase."

"No, no; I shall not sell land at the point of a shot gun, but few will escape me. And I shall watch them all. They shall buy everything through us—lumber, hardware, and even groceries. We shall charge a commission, but the pilgrim and stranger will not be imposed upon. Ours shall be a model colony."

He rubbed his hands, and then kissed his wife boyishly.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "think of the good times ahead, when we have made our million."

"A million," said Damaris, with a sarcastic smile quite wasted upon Chillingworth; "a million, Will, is not so very much. You will not stop at one million."

"Perhaps not," he said reflectively. "You are

right, dearest, a million is not a large sum. I used to think so, but we change our ideas as we grow wiser."

They were sitting on the beach. Dinner—Chillingworth had instructed Damaris to drop the provincial word supper—was over, and the lawyer had just lighted his second cigar. In front of them lay the Pacific, sublime in its moonlit immensity. A storm that had raged perhaps a thousand miles away had caused a heavy ground swell, and the huge waves were breaking sonorously upon the shingle, and streaming white and sibilant to within a few feet of where they sat.

"We change our ideas," she replied, "even if we do not grow wiser."

"Do you know, Damaris, I believe that I saw Norah O'Connor this afternoon. We were in the north-west corner of the ranch, the roughest part, and I saw a woman crossing the San Simeon creek. I could swear it was that unhappy girl. Donovan is in these mountains; some of the flagmen say they've seen him."

"You will let them alone?" she entreated. "Red Pat is a brute, but my heart aches for Norah."

"I'll leave them alone," he replied moodily, "if they'll leave me alone, but Donovan is up to some mischief. Unless I'm vastly mistaken, he's been tampering with our monuments. A man like that is a perpetual menace. He might fire the ranch next fall."

The full-orbed July days passed—too swiftly for

Chillingworth, too slowly for his wife. She practised the piano diligently, devoured magazines and books, and studied French. Her mind, so it seemed to her, had quickened; she apprehended readily, and assimilated the ideas, opinions, conceits, and motives of her favourite authors—Scott, Thackeray, Holmes, and Emerson—and was amazed to find that she had already read them to so little purpose. But the intellectual gain was more than balanced by a loss of sensibility. Her heart was hardening.

Chillingworth, returning home, always found her awaiting him, with face dimpled and smiling, and gay words of welcome upon her lips. *She never failed him.* As he neared the *adobe*, he would descry her dainty figure, a small patch upon the landscape; then she would wave her handkerchief, and he would reply with a glad shout. She usually stood in the same place, and one morning, as he rode past, he marked her footsteps in the dust, thick as quail tracks. She must have walked to and fro a thousand times. He was touched, and for some days called her his faithful quail, which pleased her, but her devotion seemed to him perfectly natural. Wives of necessity must wait and sometimes weep, for he had more than once seen pink evidence of tears; men must work. That was the law of life.

It never occurred to him, or if it did, he dismissed the idea as un-American, that the wives of men who work should work also. In supplying her with two servants, pretty dresses, a Steinway piano, and a dozen periodicals, he congratulated himself upon

doing his duty. He positively forbade this lonely woman to soil her slim fingers with brooms and stewpans, or her mind with intercourse of the baser sort.

"Don't gossip with your cook," he said ; and she obeyed.

Mrs. Fish spent a fortnight with her adopted daughter, and reported at length to Mrs. Skenk.

"It's very lonesome out there, but Damaris doesn't complain. She certainly has married a pearl of price. During my visit I never heard a cross word—not one. It hardly seems natural. Mr. Fish and I had our tiffs. When he died, poor dear man, I quite missed them. Yes ; Damaris is queer, not like me at all. It's a pity, but I can't lay the blame to myself. She's a troubled look on her face when you take her unawares, that oughtn't to be there. She's fretting, I reckon. How's that ? A baby ! Yes ; that is what she wants, but we don't all get what we want."

Damaris, indeed, had bade her mother farewell with a dismal feeling of satisfaction. The good lady had passed most of her time in the kitchen, where she found a congenial spirit in the person of the cook, an elderly female who for many years had worshipped at Lucina's shrine, as a monthly nurse.

With August came the sea-fogs. They would roll in from the ocean about four in the afternoon, an hour when our bodily powers, after the burden and heat of the day, are at their lowest ebb. These

vast, salt, wet blankets would settle inexorably upon the smiling hills and dales, robbing them of light, colour, and warmth. The feathery pepper trees would shiver beneath their chill kisses, and the long leaves of the eucalypti hang dank and motionless. To Damaris they brought an inexpressible melancholy.

"These fogs," said Chillingworth, with his exasperating optimism, "are splendid. I believe sugar-beets would grow here; they must have moisture. I should like to experiment with beans. If these valleys will raise beans, I can sell them like hot cakes at two hundred dollars an acre!"

He sometimes asked perfunctorily how she fared with her studies and music, but he was too tired at night to read himself, or to discuss what she had read during the day. The problems she timidly submitted to his consideration were dismissed with a phrase—

"These things, my dearest, have no practical bearing upon life."

She was always his dearest.

Upon the fifth day of August an adventure befell her. She had ridden as far as the San Simeon creek, and was returning home alone, when her horse shied violently at a heap of rags lying in the sage-bush. Damaris forced the animal to face the source of terror. He approached, snorting. The rags hid a woman—Norah O'Connor.

Damaris stared in speechless dismay into Norah's wild eyes. The change in the girl was horrible.

Hollow cheeks, pallid, wrinkled skin, matted hair, and a mouth distorted into a savage grin, surmounted a bent shrunken figure, bare-armed and bare-legged!

"My God!" she faltered. "Is it you, Norah?"

"Ay, it's me. Sure I wonder that yez know me, for I don't rightly know meself."

"You are living here?"

"If ye call it livin'—yis. It's fat I'm gittin' on clams, an' mussels, an' quails, an' honey! Yis; this"—she pointed derisively at the bleak rocks—"is me home!"

"You are not alone?"

"I am not."

She looked defiantly into eyes suffused with pity.

"Can I help you, Norah? I will do so gladly."

"Ye can lave us by our lone, Red Pat an' I Faith! they'll not take Pat aloive."

"Norah, why did you follow him into this wilderness?"

"For why? Ye ask, for why? An' yure a woman, wid a woman's tinder heart in yure bosom. D'ye think that a gyurl like me can live by her lone, widout frinds, or kin, or love? Red Pat is my all in all—not much maybe—but can a beggar pick an' chuse? He loved me, an' now I love him. A curse on thim as takes him from me!"

"I can give you money and—and clothes. Leave this wretched place, both of you, and——"

"Lave it?" she echoed sullenly. "Ay, to be caught like rats in a trap. In these hills we're safe. Yure money"—she shuddered—"would stain me

hands wid blood. Ye mane well, but the sight o' yure face scorches me sowl!"

She turned suddenly, and fled like a wild doe through the brush. Damaris made no attempt to follow. Nor did she mention the incident to her husband, for she feared that he would deem it his duty to drive these Ishmaelites from the stony places that harboured them. None the less, the memory of Norah hung, like the salt fog, upon her mind, and obscured the clarity of her meditations. Thought was clogged with the moisture of unshed tears.

As she sat alone in the big *sala*, tormented by the problem of vicarious sacrifice, she recalled her dream; for a dream she now regarded it. That dreary voice, stealing across the wastes of eternity, sighed a solution of the riddle—the sorrows and trials of the innocent were the torture of the damned!

"Will," she said, that same evening, "I wish I knew something of my mother—my own mother. Surely you could find out for me at least her name and fate."

"She is dead," he answered thoughtfully. "Let her rest in peace, Damaris. Why distress yourself? None would help you more cheerfully than I if some definite good were to be attained; but her life is over."

"Her life—yes; but death, dear, is not the end of life. She lives still in me. Is it not so? And if I knew more about her, some details, it—it might

help me. Surely we can borrow from the experience of others, particularly our own flesh and blood?"

"Help you?" he repeated curiously. "It would rather hurt you. Do you need help, my dear little woman?"

His anxiety affected her, but she was unwilling to burden him with her troubles. He shouldered his own cares manfully, without whine or whimper.

"I get blue, sometimes, when I'm not with you, Will. You see, sir, you've married a vixen. I'm horribly jealous of your work."

"Is that all?" he said, laughing, and kissing her soft lips. "What an absurd confession!"

During the week that followed she contrived to visit twice the San Simeon creek. Upon each occasion she scattered amongst the rocks articles of dress, a flannel petticoat, a stout serge skirt, and underlinen. She saw no sign of Norah, but on the second visit she noted with pleasure that the first instalment of clothing had been taken. A week later she found a bundle on the porch of the *adobe*. Everything she had given was contemptuously returned!

Upon the fifteenth of August—a day to be marked with white in Chillingworth's calendar—the first sale was made on the San Julian. The survey of the ranch was complete; a town site had been platted; advertisements, the joint composition of husband and wife, were inserted in more than fifty newspapers; pamphlets, embodying all that could interest prospective settlers, were strewn

broadcast from Shasta to San Diego and far over the middle west; leader-writers upon great dailies were pressed into Fabian's service; and nothing that brains, backed by capital, could devise was spared to insure a prodigious public sensation. What followed has become history. It was a first and daring experiment; it succeeded greatly. Chillingworth, overwhelmed with letters of inquiry, suddenly determined upon an auction sale—the first of the kind held in the state. A steamer was chartered, and more than five hundred pamphlet-soaked persons conveyed to Port San Julian. In the morning the visitors were shown the lands—the cream of the ranch. Then big Anton, carrying out Chillingworth's instructions, presided over an immense barbecue and clam bake. The best band on the Pacific Slope provided martial music. And at three o'clock, when popular expectation was at its apogee, a silver-tongued auctioneer ascended a rude platform, made the speech of his life, and sold, in less than four hours, *six hundred thousand dollars' worth of land!*

The people were drunk with excitement. A perfect day, a glowing landscape, unlimited beer, beef, and *tamales*, inspiring music, an accomplished speaker, and lust of speculation fired imagination and enthusiasm. The valleys—sold as the best bean lands in the state—fetched two hundred dollars an acre; the rolling hills—the home, so said the auctioneer, of all citrus and deciduous fruits—were eagerly bid in at forty; even the hills, knee-deep

in feed, brought as pasture ten and twelve! After the sale the more cautious fell into line and besieged the *adobe*. Hour after hour they stood patiently on the *varandal*, biding what they believed to be the opportunity of a lifetime. Within were Chillingworth and his clerks hard at work. Big gold eagles were passing from hand to hand, clinking merrily, and one could hear the soft rustle of bank bills and drafts of exchange, the scraping of many pens, the eager questions and answers, the loud laugh that clinched a bargain, an occasional oath, a whine eloquent of disappointment.

"Gosh!" said a raw Missourian, as he reeled into the *patio*, where the fountain tinkled its sweet gospel of peace, "I'm pow'ful weak, folks. There's a right smart chance o' men to-night as dun'no' whether they're stannin' on their heads or feets!"

From the beach floated sounds of revelry. Half San Lorenzo county was dancing on the sands, and vast bonfires were burning. As the flames leaped skyward, one could see the figures of the dancers black against the amber glare. Out in the bay the steamer rode at anchor, her lights mirrored in the still waters; from her decks, presently, a rocket soared aloft—the herald of an innumerable host. Fabian had sent the fireworks as a surprise. At the close of the display a set piece blazed out of the darkness—

GOD BLESS THE SAN JULIAN.

Long after midnight Chillingworth entered his

bedroom and called for Damaris. Upon a table was a bottle of champagne and sandwiches.

"Well," he said eagerly, "what do you think of this day's work? My share alone is sixty thousand dollars!"

What woman can withstand a conqueror. Already a reporter had dubbed Chillingworth the Napoleon of Real Estate. Throughout this feverish day she had heard his praises upon the lips of all. She, too, was intoxicated with the triumph of the hour, and seeing him standing there upon the threshold of their room, strong, flushed with victory, her husband, the lord of her heart, what could she do but fling herself into his arms in a paroxysm of love and congratulation.

"What a man you are!" she murmured, clinging to him and lifting worshipful eyes to his. "What a man!"

He uncorked the wine and filled a couple of glasses.

"We will drink," said he, "to prosperity and all that prosperity brings."

Then he ate the sandwiches, talking incessantly, fighting again the battles of the day.

"You marked old Paymiller"—the auctioneer—"eh? 'Twenty dollars, gentlemen, twenty dollars an acre I'm bid. Go the five—five—five!' And they went the five—five—five! Every time! Wasn't it glorious? He twanged the crowd like a banjo. We might have done without the dummies."

"The dummies, Will?"

"Yes; the men who start the bidding and work up the sale."

"Oh, Will! Is that necessary? It sounds unfair."

"My dear child, it's always done. Paymiller insisted. And now to bed. To-morrow we sell town lots. That site, with good luck, will bring another fifty thousand. By Jupiter, how tired I am!"

And on the morrow the crowd had swelled to even greater proportions; for the fame of the previous day's proceedings had gone abroad, and the *San Lorenzo Tribune* advised all readers that the new town, blessed with the finest harbour between San Francisco and San Diego, was likely to become a second Los Angeles! At eleven Paymiller ascended the rostrum, but had not opened his broad mouth before there arose a shout for Chillingworth. He was prepared to speak, and came forward.

"My friends," he began, mindful of the last time he had addressed a crowd in Ireland, "I'm heartily glad to see you, and touched that you should be glad to see me. I wish there were more of you; but, alas! in this big county of ours, which contains nearly three thousand square miles, there are, to-day, less than nine thousand persons. Yet Rhode Island, with twelve hundred square miles of territory, supports a population of three hundred thousand. You must help me, my friends, to change some of these figures. We can support a round half million."

He paused to let the Arcadian mind grapple with half a million, noting, with a smile, the effect of his

words. As Paymiller put it, the people were *loaded!* Most of those present were farmers. Rough-looking fellows from Missouri and Arkansas, with an uncouth dialect upon their lips and the hayseed in their hair, elbowed corn-raisers from Illinois, Iowa, and Nebraska. Here and there the pallid, clean-shaven face of a business man shone conspicuous, a beacon of intelligence illuming a desert of ignorance. Upon all brooded the spell of speculation. None loved work for work's sake. Few were honest or thrifty. These sons of the soil confound *meum* and *tuum*. Living far from the refining influences of churches and schools, and coming but seldom into contact with others of finer clay, they rarely respect property rights till they themselves become well-to-do. Then they develop a mellow conservatism that must move the gods to laughter.

Chillingworth had studied, at his leisure, the idiosyncrasies of the unwashed, was sorry for them, and honestly anxious to help them. He continued, pitching his voice in a higher key—

“ But, as I say, you—every one of you—must help me, and in helping me help yourselves. We are called a cow-county! But with our climate, our mineral wealth, and our soil, what may we not legitimately expect and demand of the future? Nowhere on God's footstool are the skies bluer, the air more balmy, the flowers more brilliant. Nowhere, I say, are the fruits of the earth produced in greater profusion and variety. Nowhere are the prospects for business more flattering, the possibilities of

failure more remote and so little to be dreaded. Why, ten acres of such land as this will yield the owner a net income of fifteen hundred dollars per annum. *But* that orchard must be tended as carefully, as lovingly, and as patiently as a nursery full of babies! What applies to apricots applies also to the prune, the vine, and the olive. You will read the direct results of my experiments in the pamphlet I see in your hands, and you can study these results in Mr. Fabian's gardens, which are open to inspection. These results have surpassed my expectations, and warrant the assertion that I most emphatically wish to make to you, viz. that the prices paid yesterday are not twenty-five per cent. of what these favoured lands are worth. There is but one thermal belt west of the Rocky Mountains!

"And I want to tell you that yesterday's work, and the history of yesterday's work, will thrill thousands, ay, tens of thousands, toiling and moiling in our great middle states. Yesterday's work, my friends, will be dwarfed, overshadowed by what can and will be done in the immediate future. In the Old World these processes of evolution are slow; in the New they are speedy, richer in results, more easily studied. I propose, ladies and gentlemen, within the next five years, to double our population, to add twenty millions of dollars to our assessed valuation!"

"Hear, hear!" shouted the crowd.

Not a man or woman present doubted the good faith of the sturdy speaker, or the executive ability

of the prophet. Surely he had honour that day in the hearts of his own people. He smiled acknowledgment and abruptly concluded—

“Take my advice, my friends, and buy *now!*”

As he stepped aside, Uncle Dave Paymiller, red-faced, pock-marked, and jubilant, confronted the audience.

“Excellent,” he whispered to Chillingworth. “Out of sight! You’re an orator.”

“Slush!” said the lawyer. “But I meant every word of it.”

As they laughed together, a shrill voice challenged attention and silence.

“Listen to me, frinds; listen to Norah O’Connor. D’ye see me”—she grinned horribly. “Yis, I’m wan o’ the products o’ this soil. I live in thim hills yonder wid Red Pat. Ay, luk well at me! Mr. William Chillin’worth has been expirimintin’ wid me. But I was betther worth the lukin’ at before the expirimintin’ began. Mike Mellish, whom yon man shot down, used to tell me that me hair was like the sunshine, me eyes like the skies, an’ me skin like the lilies an’ roses. Luk at me now! An’ out there in the cañon they tried another expirimint. The soil on the San Julian is mighty thin in places, ye can belave, so they wathered it wid blood—the blood o’ me father and brothers. An’ think ye that anything but curses’ll grow here? Think ye that ye’ll prosper on lands stolen from the poor? Niver—niver! There’s no God, but there’s a divil, an’ this is his land. Buy it, then!”

Then she laughed, the fierce, shrill laughter of a maniac, and fled.

For a moment there was silence—a strained stillness that held in thrall the tongues of little children—then an hysterical woman screamed, and the spell was broken. Paymiller rose again with a one-sided smile upon his thick lips, and demanded order; but the crowd buzzed on. Chillingworth, standing beside his wife, said fiercely—

“Curse the girl! She has spoiled the sale.”

It was curious and not unprofitable to scan the rows of faces and note the dominant expression of fear tempered by relief, the gaping mouths, dilated eyes, uplifted brows, and quivering nostrils. This furtive play of feature may be seen and studied at a public execution, after the event, when the witnesses are struggling back to the consciousness that domestic trifles still claim attention, and that even a hanging cannot interfere with three square meals a day.

Mrs. Skenk, perhaps, discussing the incident with Dr. Tapper, conveyed in her own vigorous Doric the sense of the meeting.

“I got it, doctor, in the pit o’ my stomach, as it might be goose-flesh in one’s inside, an’ a lump rose in my throat as big as a navel orange. I knoo Alviry was a-tremblin’, an’ the bench rocked an’ rocked. And when that fullish spindling, Nellie Hopkinson, screeched, I felt a heap better. Seemed as though she’d done for me what I’d ha’ been downright ashamed o’ doin’ myself. Ther’s a use

for fools in this world; I've always said it. Yes, I surmised somethin' was goin' to happen, for a big black cat came to our house last night; an' seven months ago William Chillin'worth broke his mirror! That means bad luck for seven years. Crazy, doctor? Why, of course. The poor thing ain't nohow responsible, but crazy folks have the gift o' tongues an' prophesyin'. I'd about set my mind on buyin' a corner lot on Fabian Avenoo, but I didn't like to take my title deeds from the Evil One. You needn't to laugh, Dr. Tapper, there was a plenty there, smarter than you, who acted as I did. Miss Popper had one hundred dollars in gold coin in her pocket, where she could feel it, an' she's feelin' it this minute. I'm told that Mis' Patey"—Adelina Patti—"gets five thousand dollars for a few paltry songs, but I surmise that that ther speech o' Norah O'Connor's cost William Chillin'worth four times as much."

Thus Mrs. Skenk, a woman wise in her generation.

Uncle Dave Paymiller tried to stem the tide with his funniest stories. He confessed afterwards that he had never known them fall so flat. He sold a few lots to dummies; then the bidding ceased.

However, there was balm in Gilead. The town site would sell itself, and the auction, as a whole, had established a world's record. Half the San Julian ranch was sold and paid for, one-third in cash, and the balance in notes, secured by mortgage, bearing eight per cent. interest, and payable in two, three, four, and five years. The press correspondents

were solemnly sworn to secrecy on the subject of Norah's speech.

"Silence," said one of the reporters to a brother craftsman, "is truly golden."

Fabian wired congratulations, and in the letter which followed the telegram, promised the immediate drafting of the famous articles of partnership. The great man, indeed, was quite amazed at the magnitude of Chillingworth's operations. In his opinion, such a genius was not to be matched in California; for in his safe downtown lay the options secured by the lawyer, who had quietly, and with a nominal outlay of money, obtained control of fifty leagues of land. The subdivision of these would now begin. No wonder that Dennis Fabian rubbed together his large white hands, and smiled blandly, as he read the long reports of sales.

For ten days succeeding the auction Chillingworth worked like a political boss upon the eve of a presidential election; correspondence filled the hours between six and noon; after luncheon he personally showed the lands to buyers; after dinner the sales of the afternoon were closed.

"Look at those," he said to Damaris, pointing proudly to his bills receivable. "Isn't that a pyramid worth the building?"

"You have brought home your sheaves," said Damaris. "But, Will, I never see you at all now?"

None the less she laughed, for upon her, too, was the lust of gold—"as the husband is the wife is."

He had laid the first-fruits of victory at her feet, a pair of diamond earrings.

"A year more of this," said he, "and we'll lay the foundation-stone of the castle."

Under his auspices a large lumber-yard was established in the new town. Schooners from the north discharged cargoes of rustic Oregon pine, red-wood, shingles, and shakes, barrels of Portland cement and lime, fat little kegs of nails, the seed from which spring mighty cities. Upon a large sign was inscribed the name of the merchant—a child of Israel—and below, in large white letters, "First-class lumber, thirty dollars a thousand; second-class lumber, twenty-five dollars; third-class, twenty dollars."

"Hang the scoundrel!" said Chillingworth to Damaris, after an inspection of the yards, "he only keeps third-class lumber."

"Oh, Will! you told me that you would see that none of the settlers was imposed upon."

"I can't help it now, my dear. This fellow chooses to run his business dishonestly. I won't hostile him by interference that would profit us nothing."

An office was built upon the corner of Fabian Avenue and Chillingworth Street, a wooden building, brilliant with paint, plate-glass, and varnish. Within were three rooms—an antechamber severely decorated with maps, matting, chairs, and cuspidors; beyond this the clerical department, manifesting the pomp and circumstance of a big business; and

beyond this again the sanctum, the shrine, so to speak, of the temple of Plutus, where the arch-priest sat enthroned. Outside stood two henchmen, one extremely stout, the other lean as Cassius.

"The fat fellow," said Chillingworth to all-comers, with his cheery laugh and wink, "came here five years ago on crutches. He weighed then one hundred and forty pounds. To-day he tips the beam at three hundred. I keep him to advertise the San Julian climate. The thin chap? You noticed him, of course? He's a granger just out from the East, but he's picking up! He likes clams, and has sent for his wife and babies."

In this strain he welcomed the pilgrims, entreating them courteously, but dealing with each according to his complexion.

And they came like shoals of sardines when the yellow-tail and *tuna* pursueth, hounded westward by malaria, cyclones, blizzards, and suns that suck life from men as surely as sap from corn. Damaris marked with interest this swarm of fellow-creatures, buzzing of green pastures and azure skies, their care-worn faces aglow with hope as they prattled gaily of troubles left behind in the bad lands of the Dakotas, the steppes of Nebraska, the swamps of Mississippi, and the fever-cursed valleys of Tulare and Kern. The women, in particular, whetted her sympathy and pity. They looked so thin, poor things; so unlovely; so ill-equipped to bear children, or any other burden; so crushed down by adversity! All had sold their farms "back

east" at a loss; none could pay for his new ranch in full.

"Nothing like a mortgage," said Chillingworth, as he witnessed their ill-written signatures. "It spurs a man to supreme endeavour. This glorious country of ours has been built up on credit. Thank you. Take a cigar, and, by-the-by, give me the names of your friends whom you left behind. I'll send 'em some of our pamphlets. They're better reading matter than Shakespeare. It won't cost you a cent. We pay for the stamps."

He was so busy that he transacted business on Sundays, despite the protestations of Damaris. This sabbath-breaking stirred the heart of a Methodist preacher from the San Joaquin valley—a tall, lank, sun-parched, shabby revivalist, with the sands of the desert upon his seamed face and in his grizzled hair. This poor, illiterate wretch had incurred already Chillingworth's displeasure by interfering—most unwarrantably, it must be confessed—with the sale of some land. He had obtained, as a free gift, two excellent lots in the new town, upon which he engaged to build a church and parsonage. Chillingworth bespoke in return his good offices on behalf of Fabian and himself. These had been promised. The man, however, deemed it his duty to dispute the lawyer's prices, and spoiled thereby a dozen small deals. Chillingworth told Damaris that the San Julian was not large enough to hold him and the Rev. Elihu Jordan.

"What do you want?" he asked angrily, as the

preacher walked unannounced into the *sala*, where Damaris and he were sitting.

It was past nine o'clock on Sunday night.

"I want," replied this Father in Israel, "to speak to you, Mr. Chillingworth, to clasp your hand in mine, and ask you, sir, one question."

He came forward, with a certain ridiculous dignity, and extended a singularly dirty hand. Chillingworth shook it with reluctance.

"Ask your question, Mr. Jordan."

"What," said the preacher, in a hollow voice, "what, sir, is the condition of your soul to-night? Is it washed white, my dear brother?"

Damaris turned aside to conceal a smile.

"Sit down," said Chillingworth. "I'm not sorry you called."

The preacher dropped the bundle of bones he called his body on to the edge of a chair.

"In the East," said Chillingworth, "we answer one question by asking another. You ask me about my soul. Now, I'm interested in your body. Tell me frankly, have you taken a bath lately?"

The preacher gasped with astonishment.

"You haven't," continued Chillingworth, enjoying the man's discomfiture. "I can see that you wash souls, but not your own body. Now, I want you to go home and bathe. Take plenty of water and soap, and scrub yourself well from tip to toe. Then come back here, and we'll talk about my soul. Good evening."

"You insult me," stammered the preacher, his

jaws clicking with indignation. "You insult me, sir."

"Not at all," replied the lawyer, smiling. "I wished, Mr. Jordan, to teach you a lesson. You gentlemen who preach the gospel presume sadly upon your privileges. I treated you, when you came here, with courtesy and, you will admit, generosity. You repay me by openly impugning my business methods. I will tolerate such impertinence from none, be he saint or sinner. I've hoisted you with your own petard, and you don't like it. For the future, sir, oblige me by attending to your own affairs."

The Rev. Elihu departed, not in peace, and on the morrow cast from his sandals the dust of a godless town. Curiously enough, this incident made a deep impression upon Damaris, and led to a quarrel, the first between her and Chillingworth.

"Will," she said slowly, as soon as the door of the *sala* had closed behind the preacher, "why did you speak so brutally to that poor man? It was cruel—yes, cruel! What if he is illiterate and dirty! He has given up his life—he is an old man now—to God's service. Oh! Will, Will, don't be hard on those less strong and clever than yourself. It's not like you."

"How do you know that?" he burst out irritably. "Don't take too much for granted, Damaris. For years my nose has been kept to the grindstone. I've had to weigh every word, watch every action. I dared not say what I

thought. I had to pretend. Now"—he threw back his head and expanded his chest—"now, thank Heaven! I'm independent. I can indulge myself occasionally in the luxury of plain speech. I've often had to kick myself. I propose, my dear, to kick others when I feel like it."

"Is this my husband—my kind, generous husband?"

"Oh, d—— it!"

"Will!"

"It's enough to make any man swear to listen to such sickly rot. I thought you had a sense of humour. That old idiot got what he deserved. Don't I know 'em, these preachers? You bet! And they make fools of the women every time. That fellow potters about the parlours of hard-working men praying and caterwauling, and when he goes away, after eating all the broilers on the place, the silly female ass piles up the back of his buggy with hams and sacks of flour. That sort of thing makes me ache in all my bones. You don't understand it, of course."

"I know what it is to ache in all my bones," she retorted. "I'm aching now."

Chillingworth stared moodily into her indignant face, picked up his hat, and strode out of the *sala*, slamming the door to. Damaris heard his heavy steps upon the *varandal* and upon the steps that led to the beach. She picked up a book and tried to read—in vain. The words were a meaningless jumble. The prose of life, she reflected, was also

an unmeaning jumble when love was flouted by respect. Presently her mood softened. Poor Will! Doubtless he was tired. She should have made allowances. It was her fault. Yes; she had been wanting in tact.

Smiling through her tears, she prepared some hot coffee, but its fragrance bubbled away; he did not return. She waited another hour with hardening face. Then she put out all the lights, went to her room, undressed, and got into bed without saying her prayers. Her small body was trembling, but her eyes were dry. When the truant returned she pretended to be asleep, but he kissed her cheek and shook her shoulder.

"I've walked off the devil," he said, laughing, "and I feel horribly hungry. Tumble out, darling, and let's have supper."

She sat up in bed; and he exclaimed—

"What a solemn face! I see black circles round the eyes. What has it been doing? Surely there is a kiss growing for me?"

She held up her lips, wondering why men were made upon such a different plan from women. Later, lying in his arms, she made full confession of her woes, and whispered that for a brief season she had almost hated him. He laughed, and fell asleep. But she lay wakefully silent for three dreary hours.

CHAPTER VII.

OF BLOOD AND WATER.

TOWARD the end of September the Fabians, brother and sister, Prince Paolo Casanegra, and a watch-dog, Mrs. Cornelius Sparling, better known in two continents as Mrs. Corny, took possession of the old *adobe*. Cooks and servants preceded this august party, and, at Dennis Fabian's urgent invitation, Chillingworth and his wife were constrained to stay on as guests. Damaris begged to be allowed to go to San Lorenzo for the month, but objections to meeting her cousins were overruled by her husband.

"Nothing could be better," he said, when the matter was discussed between them. "You will be most profitably entertained, you will pick up a lot of points, and it may lead to acknowledgment. There's a kind of fate about life. It looks as if it were foreordained that you should return, you dear little boomerang, to the heart of the man who flung you away. Time plays strange pranks."

"My uncle," said Damaris, according him the title for the first time, "must be a singularly cold-blooded individual. Why should he have refused

to acknowledge his only brother's child? There's a mystery about it which I hate. And it seems as though we were claiming the friendship of these Fabians under false pretences. No good will come of it, Will."

He pooh-poohed her fears, and wrote a cheque, which she cashed with many qualms. He had insisted upon some new dresses, tea-gowns, and the prettiest millinery. The purchase of these involved a trip to the city—nothing in San Lorenzo was good enough for Mrs. Chillingworth. Too busy to accompany his wife, he proposed Mrs. Fish as a substitute, and instructed that lady to buy nothing but the best at the best places.

"I want her properly turned out," he told the widow. "You understand—eh? Find out from Count Jones at the Acropolis the name of the dressmaker who cuts for Joan Fabian, and put Damaris blindly in her hands. I want nothing gorgeous, no silks and satins, but everything of the freshest and crispest. Hang the cost!"

So the two women journeyed north, and were absent a week. In a week much may be done; and, thanks to the good nature and executive ability of Madame Frangipanni et Cie, much was done. Chillingworth expressed his approval, and the widow returned to her own home with a pretty gold watch adorning her waist-belt, and a jet-trimmed dress that distracted the attention of every woman in the Episcopal church upon the following Sunday.

"William Chillingworth," she said to Mrs. Skenk,

who had enjoyed a private view of this prayer-distracting garment, "is the best husband and the most generous man in all the world. He's just my idea of what an American husband should be. He's a money-maker, and he's not afraid of spending his money. If he were my own son, I couldn't think more of him, and he always thought a great deal of me. Well, Damaris can hold up her head now with any of them. Yes, yes, indeed! A real prince of the holy Roman Empire, I've been told. He's engaged to Miss Fabian, and they'll be married next Christmas. Yes, a Catholic; that is against him. No, I've not seen any of them. They arrive next Tuesday. It's nervous work for Damaris receiving them, but I reckon she'll get through with it. The dresses that child has would stiffen any woman's backbone!"

But Damaris, in spite of the pretty frocks, felt invertebrate. Chillingworth laughed at her, and reminded his little woman that her father had been a fine gentleman. She must prove a credit to her breeding and her dressmaker!

Her fears, however, were put to flight in five minutes. Joan Fabian overwhelmed her with courtesies and kindness, and Mrs. Corny set formality at defiance; the men considerably wandered off, talking sport.

"My father," said Joan, "will not leave San Francisco. He's not really happy away from his club and his business. What a charming old house! Letty, aren't you glad you came?"

Mrs. Corny expressed her delight in the choicest slang. She had been born a Van Cortlandt, and said and did what she pleased, regardless of criticism. A woman who has dined with personages is always licensed. Mrs. Corny smoked cigarettes at all hours, played a capital game of poker, and could drive four horses, but her talk was sound sense obscured by nonsense; like her glaring yellow wig, it covered but could not conceal most remarkable brains. These, not the peculiarities which some unthinking noodles aped, were her credentials. She had carried her ugly, pleasant face into some of the greatest houses in Europe, had rebuked a prince of the blood openly, because his royal highness had told a questionable story before a young American girl, and had capped this indiscretion by winning that same evening fifty pounds from the offender and his lasting friendship. At Homburg, Baden, Monte Carlo, Newport, in London, New York, and Paris, she was loved and honoured. Of her husband nothing was known save that he had accumulated a large fortune, had made a will bequeathing all of it to his widow, and had then died, so the wits said, to give Mrs. Corny a chance of spending his money. If that was his intention, the lady had certainly not ignored his wishes.

Damaris thought her a very rare and curious specimen.

"I'm not half as bad as I look," said Mrs. Corny, conscious of the girl's shy scrutiny. "And I don't dye my hair, my dear. It's a wig. So convenient,

you know! I've mastered a couple of languages during the hours that most women sacrifice to their pates. I don't care a pin about the outside of my skull, but I trust the inside will commend itself to you. Bless me, what nice eyes you have! They remind me of somebody. Who—who? Joan, look at these big brown eyes! Who was it that owned just such a pair? Of course you don't remember! You never observe! The profile, too, is familiar. Now, my dear, don't you mind my personal remarks. They're in odious taste, aren't they? Oh, dear, why was I born so ugly? I never see a pretty face without thinking of the one my father and mother gave me."

She tapped Damaris upon the cheek, and said that she would like a whisky and soda with plenty of ice. The mere mention of such a drink at eleven in the morning provoked a pinkness. Mrs. Corny was delighted.

"She blushes for me," she cried. "You dear little woman, I must kiss you. A real blush, upon my honour! If I could blush like that I'd give up cigarettes."

Joan rang the bell and ordered the whisky and soda for Mrs. Corny, then she begged to be excused on the score of fatigue. Mrs. Corny winked at Damaris. Miss Fabian, she explained, was never tired. But the men would be back to luncheon. A traveling dress must be exchanged for some garment more eye-seducing than blue serge; salt-saturated locks must be coaxed back into curl, and so forth.

"I suppose," said Damaris, "the prince is very particular."

"The prince?" The lady screamed with laughter. "My dear child, this prinking is for your husband's benefit. What a handsome man he is! And so clever! Dennis Fabian has sung his praises to me a score of times. Bless me! How your eyes do haunt me! I've a portrait of a woman just like you hid away in some corner of my memory. Let me see—we were talking of Joan. Handsome girl, isn't she?"

Damaris conceded the point as she held a match to Mrs. Corny's cigarette. Smoking, she decided, was not unladylike in itself. It certainly lent a piquancy to tip-tilted noses and broad smiling mouths.

"I smoke," said Mrs. Corny, in her clear emphatic tones, "because I really like it. Don't you be tempted to do it. Joan does it to irritate Casanegra. What d'ye think of him? What? Not ready to give an opinion! Why, my dear, the first impressions of a woman are the only test. You know Casanegra to-day much better than you'll know him this day week. Come—come, speak out."

"He is very——"

"Plain; yes."

"And——"

"Not at all princely, *ca saute aux yeux!* But what lies beneath?"

"I think good stuff."

"Bravo! Your eyes are not merely ornamental. Go on."

"He must have a kind heart. He relieved your French maid of a big bundle of wraps, because he saw that she was very seasick."

"Yes," said Mrs. Corny, blowing innumerable rings of smoke; "he is a good fellow; and he keeps his eyes open. Well, what of Reginald?"

"He keeps his shut, doesn't he? They are very beautiful eyes."

"Many women have told him so. Yes; Reginald is rather sleepy, but he wakes up on occasion. He'll make love to you, so be prepared; and our dear Joan will make love to your nice-looking husband. Don't look so astonished. Joan is very larky, but she wants to be a Roman princess."

Mrs. Corny chattered gaily for half an hour, and then hurried away to change, not her dress, but her wig, which was cocked on one side and shockingly out of curl. Damaris tried to arrange her thoughts, in a worse condition than even Mrs. Corny's yellow locks, but gave up the task in despair. The idle talk of this fashionable dame left a bitter-sweet taste in the mouth; she became suddenly conscious of a false position where social obligations might prove intolerable. She admitted that the companionship of these idle, worldly-wise folk was desirable but dangerous. They were accomplished skaters upon slippery ice; she was a novice. Mrs. Corny spoke of love-making as if it were cigarette smoke; and Joan was a beauty, a mistress of the arts that please!

At luncheon, which lasted an hour, she compared herself to a jelly-fish lying helpless on the sands, listening to the roar of the waters, and longing to be afloat. Her husband, she noted, held his own, and roared as loudly as the rest. Mrs. Corny sparkled; Reginald theorized; Joan drank several glasses of a beverage she had brewed herself, called matrimony, half champagne and half claret with plenty of ice; Casanegra said little, ate less—he looked dyspeptic—and studied Damaris, who sat next him. Presently he said to her, in his gentle voice—

“You have Latin blood in your veins?”

“I don’t think so.”

“But I am sure of it.”

Joan caught a word and flung it to the company. “Sure?” she echoed. “What are you sure of?”

“Not of you,” said Mrs. Corny.

“I’ve never heard him use the word before,” said Joan. “That is what I complain of. He is never positive. I like positive men. Tell us, my dear Paolo, what you are sure of.”

“Of a headache,” he retorted. “What a noise you all make.”

Reginald explained. “He is sure that Mrs. Chillingworth has Latin blood in her veins. A most subtle compliment, which establishes at once an affinity.”

“Nonsense,” said Mrs. Corny, who had made inquiries. “Mrs. Chillingworth’s father was a Fish, one of the New York Fishes—my mother’s first

cousin, Consuelo Schemmerhorn, married a Fish—and the mother is from New England. I know all about Mrs. Chillingworth; she's a good American. Latin blood? Not a drop, I'll swear."

Casanegra marked his neighbour's distress, and shifted the talk with an adroit personality.

"A Fish," said he, "married my poor friend D'Arcoli, and led him a pretty dance."

"And serve him right," said Mrs. Corny. "I don't believe in these international matches. I've said it behind your back, Casanegra, and I'll say it to your face. They don't pan out well. Joan knows that I've advised you to cut and run while there's time."

"I've warned him," said Joan, "that I shall make him a shocking wife."

Casanegra stroked his moustache and looked at Damaris, reading surprise and apprehension in her luminous eyes. He had been well trained, but had never mastered the elementary principle that underlies Anglo-Saxon chaff—insensibility to the feelings of others. He liked Mrs. Corny, and regarded her as a free-lance tilting at the conventionalities, but her thrusts made him wince.

The afternoon was passed in sight-seeing. Reginald learned with pleasure that the sardines were in the bay, and the big fish that feed on them, the yellow-tail, *bonitos*, and *barracudas*. A couple of boats were engaged for the season, and two Portuguese boatmen, with whom Mrs. Corny conversed fluently. She was an accomplished fisherman as well as a

linguist. Chillingworth promised Casanegra deer and quail in abundance, and offered, much to the surprise of his wife, to sacrifice business to a day's sport! He had not taken one holiday since the honeymoon. Joan was interested in the bath-house. She and Mrs. Corny made up a swimming match, and appointed Damaris umpire. The match provoked bets.

"Who will you back?" said Casanegra to Damaris. "They are both good swimmers."

"I'll bet on Mrs. Sparling," she said shyly.

"You must back me," murmured Joan to Chillingworth. "I'm lucky. I always get what I want. So do you, I fancy."

"Not always," he replied.

Walking upon the sands they split up into pairs. Reginald undertook to show Mrs. Corny some rare forms of marine algæ; Joan made a willing prisoner of Chillingworth; the prince seemed well pleased to be left alone with Damaris.

"You are tired?" he said.

"Not physically."

"I did not mean physically. Confess that the exuberance of our friends is a little fatiguing. Is it not so?"

She assented, and allowed him to hold her parasol.

"I do not understand it," he continued, "this eternal energy. One would think that the wear and tear would destroy them."

"It destroys others. It has driven the Spanish from California, from Texas, from New Mexico. My

husband says it is the divine law, the triumph of the strong over the weak. I—I don't like to think so. I protest because, perhaps, I am weak."

He regarded her more attentively. Strength, he had of late decided, was the glory of the male, not of the female. The philathletic miss, with a big appetite and a biceps, became at times oppressive to this small, quiet gentleman, who couldn't understand chaff. Why, it may be asked, had he engaged himself to marry Joan Fabian? For several reasons quite adequate from a Roman point of view—the Casanegra blood was too thin, too blue; it needed a strong infusion of Anglo-Saxon, or the race would die out; he and his father before him were only sons; and the family exchequer was nearly depleted. "You must marry, my boy," said the old prince—"a beauty, with health and money." This advice was so obvious that the young man willingly consented to follow it to the uttermost ends of the earth, even to California. Joan, he found, somewhat to his surprise, was easily wooed, not so easily won. She refused him twice, thereby inflaming his ardour. At the third trial he conquered; but the nymph demanded time before marriage. The energy that had sustained him during the excitement of the chase languished when the quarry was overtaken. It has been said that his blood was thin.

"But the weak," he objected to Damaris, "draw strength from the strong."

"I should like to believe it. No; the strong, I fear, are unconscious vampires; they absorb the

brains and the blood, the heart and soul of the weak. Then the weak die, and the strong say that the law has been accomplished."

"Yes," he said softly; "the weak die, but that is not the end. In the state beyond the grave, unimpeded by the flesh, they may again become strong. Life here is periodic, and why not the life beyond?"

"You are a Catholic, of course?"

"Yes."

"Your doctrine of a future state has always appealed to me. I cannot doubt that the dead are given opportunities of purification beyond the grave. They must be actively at work. If communication could be established, if——"

"It may be," interrupted Casanegra. "It will be, I believe. Why not? I could cite instances, but——"

"Pray go on," she said excitedly.

"Science, Mrs. Chillingworth, is wrestling with the problem. The same medium that conveys rays of light for millions of miles may convey thought. It's a question of receiver and transmitter, of favourable conditions, of a world properly prepared to welcome the supreme truths of life and death. God did not see fit to entrust us with electricity until we had proved ourselves worthy of the gift."

"Then you think that it is a question of worthiness?" she asked; and Casanegra marked that her voice quavered.

"I cannot doubt it. Your husband is shouting to us. Shall we move on?"

Their grave faces provoked a laugh from Joan, and a dozen questions, that she answered herself, tripping lightly from heredity to a torpid liver, and thence with an airy hop, skip, and a jump to the physiology of bodily exercise! These verbal gymnastics confounded Damaris and amused Chillingworth.

"You can hand him over to me," she said in conclusion. "I can scare the blue devils out of prince or potboy. Come along, Paolo! Come and take your medicine! A two-mile walk before dinner will brace you up. Now then—march!"

Casanegra bowed to Damaris. "Miss Fabian," he said in his perfect English, marred only by a slight foreign accent, "exacts implicit obedience. I thank you for a most interesting talk."

Chillingworth hurried off in the opposite direction, explaining to his wife that work claimed him. He was loud in praise of Joan, in dispraise of Casanegra. Damaris lent a reluctant ear to his crude criticism.

"You are mistaken," she said coldly. "In a marriage of this kind, the blame attaches to the woman. Miss Fabian can marry whom she pleases; the prince's choice is circumscribed."

"Of course, you take his part. I dare say he made love to you."

"Will!"

"Don't be melodramatic. These idle, fortune-hunting foreigners think every married woman should be besieged."

"Do you think I would lend myself to—— Oh! how detestable such talk is!"

"My dearest, if he did make love to you, I should accept his homage as a compliment to me."

"Oh!"

He kissed her when they parted at the garden gate, and commended her dress, a white serge, cunningly fashioned.

"I'm a good husband," he said, pinching her cheek, "to give you so many pretty things."

She could not deny it, and expressed her gratitude. As he turned to leave, a thought seemed to strike him.

"Damaris," he said abruptly, "is jealousy a failing of yours?"

"I've not yet been tested. Why?"

"Because"—he hesitated and laughed—"because I may think it politic to pay Miss Fabian a good deal of attention. She is the kind of girl who expects that sort of thing. It's important, you'll admit, to conciliate as much as possible these people. I—er—spoke, because I would not have you misapprehend my motives."

She laid her hand upon his arm. "I can trust my husband," she answered proudly, with heightened colour. "You *could* make me jealous, Will, but not without just cause. You have all my love, dear; and a wife's love is not a thing to trifle with. Pay Miss Fabian what attentions you please—I trust you."

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A fortnight flitted by, the hours crowded with

simple pleasures—boating, fishing, bathing, and shooting. There were no trade-winds now, and few fogs; the sun rose each morning in a cloudless sky, and sank at night into an unruffled ocean; the hills fringing the bay assumed October's livery, the browns and pinks of the loveliest month in the year; in the shady cañons the springs that had failed during the long summer days began to bubble forth, heralds of the coming rains; and in the valleys the tar-weed, the *layia platyglossa*, exhaled its pungent odours.

Chillingworth, for the first time in his life, began to hate the work which fettered him to ledger and sale-book. Every morning he walked down to the office with the remonstrances of Joan ringing in his ears. Damaris had never complained, but had masked her loneliness with smiles, unwilling to tempt him from what she conceived to be his duty. Joan, piqued by his seeming indifference to pleasure, rallied him incessantly upon his greed of gain, his devotion to petty details quite unimportant in her eyes, his long interviews with ill-smelling peasants, his patience and tact with captious buyers. Moreover, she and Mrs. Corny criticized the pamphlet and the advertisements in the papers, damning them as ungrammatical and rose-coloured. For ten years he had accustomed himself to homage and respect; this merciless chaff unhinged his sense of proportion, and obscured familiar landmarks. The man was sensitive to ridicule, and masked his injuries with Spartan fortitude; but the wounds festered. To

silence their tongues he consented to relax the discipline, and to close the office at four. Joan's smiles and company more than repaid him for the loss of a possible customer.

As the hot afternoons waned he found himself anxiously consulting the clock, and the blood in his veins began to circulate more freely. Jaded by the effort to compress into six hours the work of ten, he joyfully anticipated the moment of refreshment, for Joan's smiles and small-talk stimulated him like dram-drinking. Comparisons between her and his faithful little woman were inevitable; the one braced his benumbed wits with the liveliest sallies, the other enfeebled him rather by love and solicitude. His nature craved whisky and soda, not cream. Sitting at his desk, he could recall with delight Joan's quips and quirks, the mocking curl of her red lips, the play of eye and lid, the glint of her hair. An error or two crept into the books, and provoked astonishment. He flushed uncomfortably when he confessed to himself that his faculties were no longer under perfect control. The realities of life had hitherto absorbed him—a breadwinner willing to toil and moil with no leisure to eat cakes or drink ale. Now the idealities began to twitter, ushering in the dawn of a new day.

"You confound means with ends," said Joan, as they sat together in the stern of the boat, trolling for *bonitos*—Damaris and Reginald Fabian were in another boat hard by. "You talk of building castles"—he had confided to her his ambitions—"but bricks

and mortar don't work for happiness. Money? Yes, of course, one must have money, but the mere possession of it is a responsibility, a curse rather than a blessing. Now there's Letty. Her husband was a millionaire, but he never took a holiday. He grubbed on and on, till death collared him. Of life, as I interpret the word, he knew less than you. He atrophied his capacity for pleasure, and so will you, my friend. You have the national disease badly. Let me see, you're thirty-five, aren't you? Yes. Well, you don't look it. But tell me—what have you got out of life so far? Not enough fun to put into a thimble. I wonder you've kept your youthful looks, for fun is the elixir of life, the only true wrinkle eradicator. Nothing ages a man like being serious. Yes, I'm thinking of Casanegra, poor fellow. His forbears were larky. The old prince says his prayers now to the saints. He used to pray to sinners, some of the prettiest in Europe, and that's why he believes so devoutly in the efficacy of prayer. Paolo takes after his aunt, who is Mother Superior of an Ursuline convent. He has sown no wild——”

Whir-r-r-r-r-r-r!

Her reel screamed for attention. The fine cutty-hunk line was whizzing through the water in the track of a monstrous mackerel. Joan stood up and gave the fish the butt, sharply, the rod describing what a famous sportsman has called an entrancing parabola. Chillingworth watched the combat with kindling eyes. What grace she displayed; what

dexterity ; what mastery of the angler's craft ! Soon the *bonito* stayed his mad rushes, and she reeled slowly in, the fish fighting for every inch of line. Old Joe, the Portuguese boatman, stole aft with his gaff ; the exhausted hero floated passively above the steel ; there was a quick turn of the wrist, and his iridescent majesty was sounding his own death warrant upon the bottom of the boat. Chillingworth handed Joe his flask, and a libation of Bourbon speeded the soul of the dying warrior.

"A game fish," said Joan, critically. "Fifteen pounds, at least. Time, just seven minutes !"

"You looked supremely happy."

"Seven such minutes is worth a cycle of book-keeping, eh ? Yes ; I'm thoroughly happy with a big fish at the end of a light line. The least error of judgment, and away goes the prize. There's a school of sardines over there. We ought to make a haul."

Chillingworth's reel shrieked assent, and for fifty glorious minutes the fish bit freely. Then followed the walk home across the wet sands, blood-red with the flames of sunset ; a bath, and a dinner properly cooked and served ; after dinner, coffee and cigars in the *patio*, agreeable talk ; and later, music, cards, a pillow-fight, or a drive by moonlight in the big break, with Mrs. Corny on the box, tooling four horses with the skill of a professional whip.

"This sort of thing is demoralizing for you," she said one night to Chillingworth, who sat beside her. "What will you do when we are gone ?"

His heart contracted at the word "gone."

One afternoon a notable discovery was made. Joan's curiosity urged her to explore the *tapanco*, or garret. In early days the *tapanco* was used as a storehouse for strings of jerky, *chiles*, and skins full of lard. Access was possible only by means of a ladder; a staircase would have tempted too grievously some Indian Autolycus. So far as Joan could learn the *tapanco* had been nailed up since the death of Ramon del Pliego. The Mexican woman, who had spent twenty years in the *adobe*, assured Miss Fabian that the garret was empty. None the less a ladder was brought, and the old door burst open. As the *señora* had said, the *tapanco* was empty, a desert of dust and cobwebs. Joan, however, noted with interest the vast beam which supported the roof, and summoned Damaris to inspect it and describe its uses.

"That," said Damaris, amazed at the size of the beam, "is called in Spanish *la madre*. It supports, as you see, the whole roof, and these red tiles are very heavy."

Then she told Joan the story of Don Pio Pico, as she had heard it from the lips of the Rev. Abner. How in Los Angeles the wily governor was found by his enemies, Alvarado and Castro, lying along the top of the beam, and ignominiously haled forth, in his shirt, shivering with cold and fear! The girls agreed that half a regiment might be harboured by such a mother as the one above, and Damaris explained that sometimes more than two hundred

Indians were employed to handle these vast timbers. Joan decided to explore further. A step-ladder was hauled up; the adventurous girl gaily mounted its rungs, crept on to the beam, and proclaimed excitedly the discovery of two large trunks! These were carried down into the *sala*, and the rest of the party summoned. Admiration at first tempered curiosity. They were genuine Spanish trunks, *baules*, made when the century was young by a master craftsman. Each chest was of camphor-wood, covered with leather, painted a bright vermilion, studded and bound with brass. Most decorative, as Mrs. Corny observed, and doubtless moth-proof! A cold chisel, in the hands of Reginald, forced the lock, and, lo! the *baules* were found to be full of ancient garments—*calzoneras*, *rebozos*, *mantillas*, *tapalos*, silks, satins, and velvets, with several pairs of white silk shoes and stockings, and other articles of male and female attire. Mrs. Corny was enchanted.

“To-night,” she said, “we will dress up. I wish I had a black wig! We’ll hold high revel! Casanegra and Mrs. Chillingworth will play the parts of bride and groom. Depend upon it, these clothes have been seen at many a wedding!”

Damaris was entreated to tell some tales of the golden age, and willingly consented. Sitting in the *patio*, with the quaint arches of the *varandal* surrounding them on three sides, inhaling the scent of the Castilian roses and orange blossom, and listening to the tinkle of the fountain, it proved

no difficult task to roll back the years. When she had finished the last story, tears were in Mrs. Corny's small bright eyes, and Casanegra coughed suspiciously. Reginald said, in a low voice—

"This country belongs to those people. We robbed them of it. Yes; it was the golden age. There were a simple, kindly, mirthful race; and their glory has departed! Mrs. Chillingworth, you've given us a most delightful entertainment. One might believe that these haughty señors had sent you from the shades on purpose to arraign us Gringos. Your eyes flashed, your lips quivered, your bosom heaved beneath the burden of their wrongs!"

"I have always had," she murmured, "an extraordinary sympathy for the Spanish."

After dinner the afternoon's programme was faithfully carried out. The old Mexican serving-woman lent a pair of fat trembling hands and much advice concerning *coiffure* and the classic arrangement of the seductive *mantilla*. Finally, they filed forth from their several rooms, a goodly company meetly apparelled for *contradanza*, *cachucha*, or *borrego*. But at sight of Damaris, in a bride's yellow satin bravery, Mrs. Corny uttered an exclamation, a shrill "Ah!" of amazement.

"I have it!" she cried. "I have it! Mrs. Chillingworth, you are the living image of the beautiful Dolores Arrillaga!"

"And who," said Joan, "was the beautiful Dolores Arrillaga?"

"The name," murmured Casanegra, "is a romance in itself."

All eyes were turned upon Mrs. Corny, who, it must be confessed, looked a sorry specimen of a *dueña*. The lady was crimson with confusion.

"Dolores," she answered, "was—er—everything she ought not to have been. I must apologize to Mrs. Chillingworth for mentioning her name; but the resemblance is certainly extraordinary."

"Mrs. Chillingworth accepts your apologies, Letty. Now, having put your foot into it, pray go on."

But Mrs. Corny hesitated; her self-possession seemed to have taken wings; finally, she said abruptly—

"Dolores Arrillaga was a destroying angel who lived in San Francisco long ago, when I was a little girl. She mysteriously disappeared; that's all I know."

"That's all you want us to know," observed Joan.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Corny, with a grim smile.

Casanegra and Reginald came to her rescue with a guitar, which they placed in the hands of Damaris. She accepted it with a sweeping curtsy, struck a few chords, and began the beautiful dance, *El Son*. Her body swayed rhythmically to the old-world measures; her eyes began to flash beneath the lowered lids; her slender feet stole in and out beneath the filmy laces of her petticoat.

"*Brava! bravissima!*" cried Casanegra.

She advanced, retreated, advanced again, smiling,

seductive, with love and languor in her glance. Chillingworth hardly recognized his wife in this alluring creature, who danced as if she were the daughter of a thousand *hidalgos*. And she was dancing for him alone. Did some subtle instinct warn her of a rival present? Who can say? But no man save Chillingworth caught her glance. Into his soul she poured the ardours of *El Son*, the flames of the god of melody.

When she sank exhausted upon a chair he bent over and whispered a love phrase; then the others crowded round her and buzzed their thanks and compliments.

"Surely," muttered the Italian, "she belongs to the Latin race."

Later in the evening Chillingworth found himself alone with Mrs. Corny.

"Tell me," he said gravely, "the story of Dolores Arrillaga. I don't ask out of idle curiosity. I've a reason—a strong reason."

Mrs. Corny laughed nervously behind her fan. "My tongue should be cut out," she replied; "it's a faithless servant. Yes; I'll tell you. Dolores Arrillaga was a descendant of one of the great families. Her forbears had been governors of the state under the Spanish rule, before the Mexican independence. My mother, who visited California in '60, has told me of her great beauty, her charm, and her audacity. And once I saw her. Your wife is singularly like her, but only, of course, in feature. Well, one day Dolores disappeared. It was never

exactly known with whom or for whom she left society, but everybody said that Dennis Fabian was her seducer."

"My God!" ejaculated Chillingworth, white-lipped and trembling with excitement.

"The gossips said," murmured Mrs. Corny, "that the man was crazy for love of her; that his wife found it out, took it most bitterly to heart, and died. Dennis Fabian was a handsome man, and it was notorious that his wife worshipped him, and that he cared nothing for her."

"Well?" said Chillingworth, breathlessly.

"That is all I know. Fancy my blurting out the girl's name before Fabian's own children! Horrible!"

"But Dolores——"

"You must remember I was not fourteen when this happened. I heard after I married that she had left Fabian's protection and bolted with another man. There is always another man in such cases."

"Is there?" he asked absently.

"There must have been a taint in the blood," said Mrs. Corny. "Sensuality crops out. Dennis Fabian is now the pink of propriety, but he, too, comes of wild stock. The father of Dolores did all sorts of shocking things. Of course the curse descended. Depend upon it—I could cite a dozen instances, facts I've stumbled over—depend upon it, Dolores proved false to Fabian as she was false to her husband."

"She was married?"

"Why, of course. I forget her husband's name. In those days a Spanish wife often went by her maiden name. Certainly she was married. Her husband blew his brains out—silly fool!--when she ran away. That's why she was called the Destroying Angel."

"She left no children?"

"I think not. Fortunately, say I."

"You believe that——"

"The curse descends. Who questions it? Let us talk of something more agreeable than the sins of fathers. Let me tell you, sir, that you're a highly favoured individual. You possess a perfectly charming wife, who truly loves you. That dance of hers was enchanting. Ah! love is the sauce that seasons every dish. She loves you—that bewitching little creature. And, by the gods, she can love, I'll be bound; and hate, too. She has the blood-red lips of the goddess of battle. Treat her tenderly, my friend."

He made no reply.

"You are a queerly assorted couple," pursued Mrs. Corny, who delighted in abstractions, and liked the sound of her own voice. "Your mind is objective, hers subjective. Externals appeal to you—eh? I know your weakness," she chuckled good-humouredly. "Let me whisper a bit of wisdom in your ear—I'm older than you by a couple of years—the applause of the world is echoed in hell, not in heaven! Don't dare to frown at me! I like you and I love your little wife. Dennis Fabian swears

that you will arrive. Perhaps. Fortune is fickle, you know. But if you die owning half the earth, it will profit you nothing if you find you have lost your wife's love."

"Why should I lose it?" he asked coldly. "She is a simple-minded woman."

"Simple-minded? It's you who are simple, if you think that. Unless I'm grievously mistaken, she is a bundle of complexities, of contradictions, a nature at civil war with itself. And she is yours to make or mar."

Later, when he was alone, he cursed the doctrine of compensation. Why did Fortune never come with both hands full? Why had she crowned him with laurels and then pelted him with mud? For the facts were grinning in his face—his wife was the daughter of a wanton, with a wanton's blood in her veins, prenataally accursed! Otho Fabian, without doubt, had robbed his brother of his mistress, an unpardonable sin. Hence the repudiation of the child.

The knowledge that *his* wife was the natural daughter of an adulteress not only ruffled his vanity, but tore to tatters sentiments inherited from a stern Puritan mother. The forlorn position of Damaris should have quickened sympathy, pity, mercy—all the emotions that in the strenuous endeavours of the past decade had been denied expression. Alas! it was not so.

Yet he faced the bitter truth with a grim smile. A believer in the conservation of energy, he held

that metaphysical subtleties sapped the brain of that essential oil which keeps unclogged the wheels of action. He could not afford to split straws speculating upon what might have been; free, he might have won the hand of Joan!

Presently he reflected complacently that a weaker mortal would not have accepted this slap in the face so philosophically. It is conceivable that a personal devil, with a sense of humour, was playing the lackey to William Chillingworth, decently draping his nakedness with the fig-leaves of self-righteousness! If so, the valet must have smiled.

He pursued these reflections walking up and down the beach. At such times bodily exercise was an imperious necessity. At midnight he sought his room, and found Damaris aflame with excitement. Her nimble wit had linked cause and effect.

"Will," she said, throwing herself into his arms; "Will, my darling husband, I am the daughter of that unfortunate Dolores Arrillaga; I cannot doubt it. Do you still love me—me the child of a wicked mother, of a destroying angel? Say that you love me! Quick! quick!"

A wise man would have embraced both wife and opportunity. Chillingworth led this trembling creature to a chair and bade her control herself. If he had told her all, sparing neither himself nor her, caressing and consoling, kissing tears into smiles and fear into hope, the tragedy of their two lives might have been averted. But he had wilfully decided to shut his own eyes to the past. He must

blind, too, the innocent victim with red-hot lies, if nothing else would serve.

"My dearest," he said calmly, touching her hot forehead with his lips. "what nonsense is this?"

"Do you not see the connection between us, Will? The mystery of my mother, this extraordinary likeness, and—and my feelings, my sympathy with the Spanish! Is truth to be denied when you see her with your soul's eye, as I see her, now? And my father's warnings—Mr. Fish, I mean—did he not tell me there was evil in me? Do I not know that I am not as other girls? *Ay de mi!* I am indeed the child of Dolores Arrillaga! Mrs. Corny's confusion betrayed her. She suspects something."

"She does not. Listen to me. I have spoken to Mrs. Corny. I know all about that—that woman. She was related to the Fabians; hence Mrs. Corny's embarrassment. The children, of course, have been kept in ignorance of her name. She was very near and dear to the father—a first cousin perhaps. Do you understand? Mrs. Corny swore me to secrecy; so don't mention the matter. You, of course, have her blood in your veins. The likeness has cropped out; it often does."

She was but half convinced. "You swear this is the truth? You are not trying to hoodwink me? That would be too cruel, and—and a blunder beside!"

"I swear it. Are you satisfied?"

"You look at me so queerly."

"Damaris, I hate to scold you, but these scenes

are so—so very distressing to me. You are no longer a girl. Why don't you try and control your imagination? See, you're quite exhausted, limp! To-morrow you'll look like a ghost."

"I don't care how I look."

"But I care very much. These people may think I've been beating you."

"Will! How absurd! There, I'll wear a smile to please you. I'll dance *El Son* if you'll stop frowning. Your frowns make life hateful. Do you know it was not the belief that I was the child of Dolores that worried me, but fear of what you would say about it. I—I suppose it would have—have made you very—very unhappy?" She whispered the last word into his ear.

"What a child you are, Damaris!"

"No—but tell me. Would you have minded so very, very much?"

Some devil prompted his answer. "Minded? Good God! *Minded?* You are crazy to ask such a question! As if any decent man wouldn't be shocked to discover that his wife, the mother, perhaps, of his children, was the daughter of an adulteress, a wanton!"

She shrank from him in dismay; the light in his eyes affrighted her.

"But if it were so, I, Will, your wife, I would be innocent."

"Innocent! Yes, but the potentialities, the possibilities latent in— Oh, confound it! I cannot discuss such a subject. Let's go to bed."

She passed a sleepless night, twisting and turning the problems her husband had refused to solve. Intuition warned her that something was amiss, a rift within the lute. Why had he regarded her so coldly? Why had his good-night kiss chilled instead of warmed? By the light of a crescent moon she studied his features—the square brow, the finely modelled nose, with its broad bridge and well-cut nostrils; the massive chin and compressed lips—strength in repose, eloquence asleep! As she hung over him entranced, his mouth quivered, words fluttered forth, a sigh, a groan. She bent her head, as an ox before the axe, and received the blow.

“I might have married Joan.”

The sentence burnt itself into her heart, slowly, as vitriol eats away the tissues of the flesh. She retreated, shuddering, to the farthest corner of the bed.

Upon the morrow she remained in her room, pleading fatigue. Her husband went early to his office. At ten she entered the *sala*, and found Reginald alone; the others were gone a-fishing; the yellow-tail were in the bay. Damaris asked, languidly, why he had forsworn sport. Her face was very white, and the pupils of her eyes abnormally dilated. Reginald told himself that he had never seen her look so attractive, so interesting.

“I waited for you,” he said simply. “I thought you would be tired. You took it out of yourself last night. By Gad! I never saw such dancing. You reminded me of Kate Vaughan.”

She had never heard of Kate Vaughan, and said

so. He explained, sitting at her feet. For the past fortnight he had paid her marked attention, the homage of a gentleman, stainless of offence. They had found each other congenial and sympathetic. The young man talked well, feelingly, and not without wit. His life, so far, had proved a pleasant pilgrimage. Lounging through sweet-smelling gardens, he had plucked here and there some flowers of rhetoric; a lavender-scented eloquence that he aired for a chosen few. He and Damaris met upon the borderline that divides extremes; he had seen everything, she nothing. Intensely receptive, she exhibited a vacuum to experience. Experience took possession with windy prolixity. The man could turn a phrase, and liked an appreciative audience of one—a married woman, preferably; from the gallery, he feared ridicule. He was sensuous rather than sensual; said that he generally preferred the portrait of a pretty woman to the woman herself, and maintained that art, not conduct, was three-fourths of life. Mrs. Corny told him that he was a type, a composite photograph, of the sons of America's richest men. He could ride to hounds, shoot driven grouse, throw a salmon fly, talk three languages, and discourse with intelligence upon music, painting, and literature. The energy of the father had been inherited by the son, and squandered. Casanegra used leisure; Reginald Fabian abused it, unconsciously of course.

“Shall we fish? Or stay here—it's very comfy in this window-seat—and talk.”

"If you will talk, Mr. Fabian, I shall be delighted to listen. Choose some interesting subject."

"You, for instance?"

"Not on any account! Perhaps you had better sit a little farther off. I feel suffocated this morning. That is about the right distance. Thank you. Mrs. Corny won't forgive me for depriving her of your society."

"Mrs. Corny, my dear Mrs. Chillingworth, is too brutally outspoken to please me. We don't pull together in a boat, or out of it. Casanegra is with her."

"Indeed! And your sister?"

"She's with your husband. He went to the office at nine, but returned in half an hour, and said he would take a holiday."

"Oh!"

"Joan was enchanted. Between ourselves, Casanegra bores her. He's a dear good fellow, one of the very best, but *tepid*. Talking with him is like eating an anæmic egg, one with lemon-coloured yolk. It may be all right; but, you know——"

"I respect the prince. Men may be too fresh."

"Well, Joan has to marry him, so I don't blame her much. Your husband suits her down to the ground."

"Indeed?"

"They both take the large view, you know. It's—er—climatic. California is a country of big distances—not like England, which I prefer. I was educated at Eton, Mrs. Chillingworth. I call myself a cosmopolitan. Your husband looks upon every-

thing as *en gros*. He will make pots of money in this country. My father says so. Millions! You see, they know what they're doing, and these poor devils who buy from them don't. That's the case in a nutshell. The bottom will drop out of this amazing boom in a couple of years, but by that time Chillingworth will have feathered his nest. The auction was a *coup d'état*, the smartest thing that has been done in California. Frankly speaking, this juggling with the weaknesses of your fellow citizens doesn't commend itself to my sense of honour; but——"

"You are criticizing my husband, Mr. Fabian."

"I beg pardon. I had no wish to offend. I was also criticizing my own father. Don't think I blame them. In this free and glorious country the unpardonable sin is failure. My sister wouldn't be seen speaking with Chillingworth if he had failed. His success intoxicates her. She worships power. That's why she wants to be a princess. She threw over Jack Hardcastle, the famous polo-player, because he was only heir to a baronetcy."

"Why do you tell me these things? You belittle your sister and yourself."

"Oh, between friends, facts are facts! I count you a friend."

"I need a friend," said Damaris, slowly; "but——"

"Yes?"

"But, I fear, you will not do. You are too critical of others. Your friends should at least be spared. In less than ten minutes you have laid the lash on

to Mrs. Corny, your own father, your sister, the prince, and my husband."

"I did it out of sympathy for you."

"For me?"

She raised her brows in startled interrogation. The young man took her hand.

"I'm so awfully sorry for you," he whispered.

She withdrew her hand, and asked coldly, "Why?"

But her heart began to beat. Was it possible that she had betrayed herself? Fabian looked at her; he had extremely handsome eyes, and stroked his moustache, but he ignored the chilly "why."

"You are not as other women," he said abruptly. "Thank Heaven for that! I thought I should please you. I was an egregious ass. Forgive me. I do not dare to tell you what is in my heart, but if you really need a friend, I am the man."

His reticence frightened her; an unsophisticated woman is so easily puzzled. What lay behind these sympathetic eyes? She feared to repeat the "why," and temporized.

"I spend my time," murmured Reginald, "thinking how I can please you."

Twenty-four hours before she would have rebuked him sharply, now she was conscious of a sense of obligation.

"I came gallantly to your rescue last night, when I saw your distress. That is why I was down upon Mrs. Corny. She is a good sort, but terribly indiscreet. How dared she mention the name of that woman before me. And to compare her to you! I

was boiling with indignation." He was piqued that she displayed no curiosity, and continued, "I saw that you had heard of Dolores Arrillaga—of her shameful story. And, knowing it, I am surprised that you should take me to task for criticizing my father. I have never forgiven him his treatment of my poor mother."

"Pray stop," said Damaris. "I—I don't know the story."

"Then why did you blush and tremble at the mere mention of her name?"

"I was not aware that I did so. But I—I am interested in Dolores. Tell me about her."

"It's an ugly tale," he stammered, "and ancient history in Southern California."

"Tell me the story," she persisted.

"Dolores Arrillaga," he said moodily, unwilling to risk her displeasure, "was the wife of a Los Angeles lawyer. She was persuaded by my father to leave her husband. The wretched man blew his brains out. And the scandal and horror of it—it was hushed up; but, of course, it leaked out—broke my poor mother's heart. When I came of age, I investigated the facts for myself. My father met the punishment he deserved; this woman, whom he loved with the maddest infatuation, proved false. She eloped with his own brother. My God! Mrs. Chillingworth, what is the matter?"

She was leaning forward, a piteous figure, ghastly and wild-eyed. As he stretched out his hands, she fell back upon the window-seat. She had fainted.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHICH ENDS IN FLAMES.

WHEN she recovered consciousness Damaris felt rather than saw that Reginald Fabian was kissing her hands, and she heard incoherent protestations of love and despair; passionate words that quickened the flow of blood through the arteries, that bit deep into the brain. For a few seconds muscular paralysis held her a prisoner; she could not move, nor speak, but the perceptive faculties were whetted to amazing keenness. When she opened her eyes, Fabian had assumed the mask; he was standing near, but not too near, conventionally solicitous, politely dismayed, eager to proffer assistance and advice.

“Don’t be alarmed,” he said reassuringly. “You fainted—that’s all. These old *adobes* are intolerably stuffy. Lie quiet for a minute. A glass of champagne would be just the thing, eh?”

He hurried away, and Damaris furtively rubbed the hand he had kissed. Then she sat up, saying to herself—

“I am the daughter of Dolores Arrillaga. My

husband has lied to me. He knows the facts, and wishes that he had waited for Joan Fabian. She would have brought him an unstained name and several millions. He loves me no longer."

No projectile flies straight to the target; there is always a parabola, and the exact curve can be determined by mathematicians. It depends, they tell us, upon the weight of the missile, the distance to be traversed, atmospheric pressure, and the amount of force employed. What applies to physics pertains also to metaphysics! Thoughts, like bullets, travel to conclusions at a high rate of speed, but never along a straight line, and the curve is subject to laws inviolable, but at present ill-defined. In certain cases these laws are simple as A B C; in others, more complex than the Chinese alphabet. Take the broken sentences as given above, and let us try to determine one or two factors in the sum of this unhappy wife's conclusions. She assumes that Joan's prospective millions would add their burden to Chillingworth's regrets. Obviously, she is merely the mouthpiece of a Fabian, an Anglo-Saxon, a Worldly Wiseman, shrewd and calculating. She lays emphasis upon her mother's cracked reputation, and proclaims her bondage to Mrs. Fish. She is horror-struck because Chillingworth has deliberately lied to her. The Rev. Abner taught her to adore truth. She concludes—

"He loves me no longer." Here we have the *miserere* of a Spanish woman, the wail of an undisciplined child of the south.

When Reginald returned with a pint of champagne and a bottle of eau de Cologne, she thanked him with pretty self-possession. The Anglo-Saxon had his heel upon the Spaniard, and smiled.

"I was frightened out of my wits," confessed the young man; "but, upon my soul, Mrs. Chillingworth, I—er—know now what Galatea looked like before the divine spark was infused into the marble. And I can imagine how Pygmalion felt. The story never appealed to me before. I dare say the myth was founded on fact—eh? A young sculptor, with a trained sense of the beautiful, finds his ideal in a dead faint. He restores her to life by—well, I shouldn't be surprised if he kissed her hand. Hang it! he couldn't help it. Then she opens her eyes and——"

"Tells him that he has taken an unwarrantable liberty," said Damaris.

Reginald laughed. He suspected that his kisses had not been wasted upon marble.

"Nothing of the sort. She opens her eyes—lovely eyes—and Pygmalion swears eternal devotion."

"How easy it is to swear, Mr. Fabian. Eternal devotion! What twaddle! Pygmalion was a sculptor; he had his business; I've no doubt the price of marble bothered him. At best he could offer Galatea an undivided one-tenth interest in his heart—a heart probably the worse for wear."

She was still smiling, with all the furies gnawing at her vitals. Instinct told her to hide misery in

her own room; pride constrained her to stay where she was. The champagne lent its stimulus; and the knowledge that she had inspired love in Reginald was not altogether distressing. He was her cousin, and in trouble the ties of blood are a very real bond of union. His chatter drowned the chorus of devils. His handsome face, eloquent of sympathy, thrust aside for the moment the ghost of Dolores Arrillaga. So she remained in the *sala*, sipping her wine and smiling.

"What a cynic you are!" said Reginald, not altogether surprised at her outburst. He had marked Chillingworth's attentions to his sister.

"I detest humbug. Eternal devotion is the red rag that all men flaunt in the face of women."

"You could inspire it," he murmured.

Her tender mouth quivered. "Not I."

Then she feared that she was losing self-control, and fled, pleading as an excuse a desire to rest before luncheon. Fabian accompanied her to her room, which adjoined the *sala*.

"Before I fainted," she said, with her fingers upon the handle of the door, "you were telling me of that unfortunate woman. What became of her?"

"She died," he answered.

As soon as the door had closed, she threw herself upon the bed, shut her eyes, and tried to weigh dispassionately causes and effects. Alas! she was too distraught to think, too deeply distressed to lie still. Unable to marshal the thoughts stampeding through her brain, denied the consolation of tears, she began

to pace feverishly up and down the room. The stupendous primal fact that her husband had ceased to love her corroded reason and common sense. Jealousy—the jealousy of an Arrillaga—stirred every fibre of her being.

In this almost insane condition Chillingworth found her upon his return at noon. He burst into her presence with a cheery laugh upon his lips, the incarnation of robust health and good humour. He had just killed a magnificent yellow-tail, after an exciting battle of twenty minutes. The fish scaled forty-eight pounds, the heaviest that had been taken in the San Julian bay, and the conqueror had been overwhelmed with congratulation. "You're too lucky," said Mrs. Corny, who had trolled patiently for two hours, and not had a nibble; "I advise you to sacrifice something to the gods." He had smiled, well pleased to be counted Fortune's favourite. Fresh air, salt water, an agreeable companion, and a big fish, had combined to lighten his heart. Dolores Arrillaga, he told himself, was dead, but he was alive—very much alive! His vitality, indeed, had provoked acknowledgment from Joan. "Mentally and physically," she had said, "you're the most active man I've ever met." These words, and the glance that escorted them, had warmed his heart. Joan seldom flattered. She had wisely decided that a Triton wearies of a minnow's adulation—till it is withheld. Her somewhat contemptuous acceptance of his triumphs stung his pride and whetted a wish to please. It has been observed already that he was

unversed in women's wiles. A yellow-tail possesses extraordinary strength and speed, but he comes to the gaff at the end of a line that a slight jerk will snap. Joan professed the utmost enthusiasm for sea-fishing, but she was more fortunate than Mrs. Corny—her Triton was always nibbling at the bait.

Damaris wasted no time in verbiage. "Why did you lie to me last night about my mother?"

Utterly confounded, he stammered out, "F-for your s-sake, Damaris, and for m-mine."

"Is it for my sake that you leave me alone, and spend your time with Joan Fabian? Prince Casanegra may submit to be made a fool, but——"

"This is nonsense," he retorted angrily. "What have you heard? What is the meaning of this violence? You appear to have stumbled upon the truth. I tried to spare you. Yes; I lied. I would do it again. But what has Miss Fabian to do with us? I've paid her the commonest attentions——"

"I approve the adjective—the commonest, as you say. What all men consider legitimate homage. Unfortunately for me, when I married you I believed that I was giving myself to one superior to the common herd. What a fool a young girl is!"

Her bitterness bewildered him. He was sensible of Joan's attractions—her wit, charm, and beauty, but none, save an insanely jealous woman, could impugn his loyalty as a husband. A retentive memory told him that he had bandied jests and compliments with his patron's daughter, had sought her good opinion, her smiles—what a smile the witch

had!—her company as a jolly comrade, her criticism—she inherited the shrewdness of her sire—her advice, and so forth; she was congenial, sympathetic—in one word, a friend, nothing more! How could she be anything more? Damaris lent a scornful ear to this justification. Then she said slowly—

“It’s policy to throw dust in my eyes, isn’t it? I neither know, nor care to know, what has passed between you and Joan Fabian. You are a lawyer, a practised pleader, able to take advantage of the subtle difference between the letter and spirit of a statute. How dare you stand there, and glibly lie to me? You prefer that woman to me, and in your heart you know it! Already you regret our marriage! If you had the choice *now*, if Joan were here with her father’s millions behind her, and behind me the shadow of my mother’s sin, which would you take to wife?”

She stood before him, white with fury, passion blazing in her dark eyes.

Chillingworth recoiled. “This is madness,” he stammered.

“Don’t forget,” she continued, “that I am the daughter of Dolores Arrillaga. She could love, and count the world well lost for love. And she could hate. Ah! you pride yourself upon your strength, your self-control, your reserve, but these have betrayed you! You’re so loose of soul that you blab your secrets when asleep! Last night, as I hung over you—poor, fond fool!—your lips moved. I listened. And oh, my God! will the

memory of what you said ever pass from me? Never!"

"What did I say?"

"Enough to convince me that I had given you all I had to give, and had received in exchange—what? Your heart? Your soul? No; your body! A hundred and eighty pounds of flesh!"

Her passion, feeding upon itself, became intenser, more dramatic. She raved on—

"But your big body is nothing to me. Do you understand? Nothing. I despise it! Take it to the woman who can appreciate it, and let me go my way. Shall I tell you that I loathe the very sight of you? Shall I add that your success disgusts me? That I see you as you are—a man with a mind set upon material things, a worshipper of the golden calf, a——"

"Stop!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "Be silent!"

His personal magnetism sealed her lips.

"I'm so unprepared for this—this violence, that I hardly trust myself to answer you. You accuse me of babbling some absurdities in my sleep. Do you hold me accountable for words inspired possibly by a nightmare?"

"You forget," she replied, moderating her tone, "you forget what passed before that. I had asked you a question, which you answered. From the words, from the tone of your voice, from the look on your face, I learned that the daughter of that unhappy woman, although innocent herself, would bring to her husband the legacy of a mother's sin.

Your lips quivered when you spoke of the possibilities, the potentialities—— In your agitation you could not finish the sentence. I inferred the damning conclusion. Ah, William Chillingworth, you were honest then! But I had your assurance, your oath—that Dolores was a cousin of Mr. Fabian, not my mother, and, believing you implicitly, I tried to persuade myself that the cruel words spoken in your sleep were indeed inspired, as you say, by a nightmare. You kissed me this morning, when I told you I was too tired to get up, and I kissed you back. Do you remember? That kiss wiped out the anguish of the night. Then I learned from Reginald Fabian that you were with his sister. You, who never spared me an hour from your business when I was alone and desolate, were willing to give up a morning to a stranger! You had left me worn out, almost ill. Did you think of me, your wife, when you hurried away with Joan?"

"I swear I did," he replied eagerly. "Mrs. Corny's maid told me that you were asleep. I feared to disturb you. On my honour, I swear that I——"

"Don't swear. You swore last night. Hear me out. I learned, I repeat, that you had gone fishing with Joan Fabian at a time when your heart should have told you that I needed you. Even a stranger was kinder than you, and waited for me. From him, by the merest accident, I learned the truth. I am the daughter of Dolores Arrillaga, as unhappy as she, as forlorn. You have no love for the child of——of an adulteress!"

The passion had died out of her voice and face, leaving most piteous dejection in its place.

Chillingworth was deeply moved. "My love is still yours," he said softly, "if—if you care to take it."

She gazed at him, incredulously, and shook her head.

"You say that," she faltered, "because you are sorry for me."

"I love you," he repeated emphatically.

His voice did not ring quite true; there was no note of passion in his deep tones; the husband, not the lover, stood confessed. No man can fling aside the habit of years. Here was a lawyer, a subtle craftsman, whose brain may be compared to a highly sensitized plate, registering automatically certain vibrations, and recording them alone. In his opinion women, as slaves of impulse, were not to be held responsible for every idle phrase. Damaris—she had Latin blood in her veins—might vow she hated him and tear a passion to tatters, but a few calm, judicious words and a kiss or two would adjust the female equilibrium. Knowing himself to be innocent of any serious offence, he could afford to be generous and magnanimous in his dealings with a young and pretty wife, unballasted by experience. *But*—the conjunction could not be ignored—her criticism of his business methods, her undigested judgment upon his conduct as a citizen and a man, and her sweeping condemnation of him as a mammon worshipper, these things were not lightly to be

dismissed. They implied chaos, anarchy, socialism. Mrs. Corny had measured this undisciplined nature aright. She was indeed a bundle of complexities, and he had always adored in her—sweet simplicity!

They looked at each other in silence; then Damaris turned aside and fell upon her knees by the bed, sobbing hysterically. Chillingworth picked her up and laid her on the couch by the window. He marked with a keen pang a pain-distorted face and twitching lips.

“My darling,” he said quickly, the tenderness of his voice not to be mistaken, “what is the matter? Tell me, my sweet little woman!”

He kissed her eyes and hair and mouth in an ecstasy of love and pity. Her glance met his, and she smiled bravely.

“I’ve jumped from hell to heaven,” she whispered; then her face changed again, and her fingers began to writhe into horrid knots.

The strong man was terrified. “Merciful God!” he exclaimed. “Have I killed her?”

The room boasted no bell, but the open window looked out upon the *patio*. Chillingworth shouted loudly for Mrs. Corny. She came running, examined Damaris, asked a question, and pushed the husband to the door. Upon the threshold she said curtly—

“Send for a doctor and a nurse.”

“A nurse? I didn’t sus——”

“Of course you didn’t! Nor any one else! Quick!”

As he ran he remembered that the woman who

had cooked for them before the advent of Fabian's *chef* had practised as a midwife. Fortunately she had not been dismissed, but had stayed on as a house-keeper. He sent her to Damaris and dispatched a groom for Dr. Lowly. Then he sat down to wait—outside his wife's door. At that moment there was no more truly miserable wretch in the state of California.

Presently Mrs. Corny whispered some good tidings. He looked up with haggard face and wet eyes, pressing her plump hand convulsively, but unable to speak. She had never liked him so well as in this hour of weakness.

"Cheer up," she said, shaking her yellow curls and winking violently. "There might have been a christening seven months hence, but it must be indefinitely postponed. Mrs. Farnum seems to understand her business. In a fortnight your little woman will be trotting about again."

The doctor confirmed this good news, prescribing rest and liquid refreshment—port wine, Guinness' stout, and a tonic. Before he returned to San Lorenzo he took Chillingworth aside.

"I've no wish to alarm you," he said quietly, "but from what you tell me this mishap was occasioned by mental rather than physical disturbance. It is often so. Your wife, Chillingworth, is a high-strung woman. You must be careful, my dear fellow. I've known her from a child, and I know you. As friend and physician I repeat—be careful! Cerebral congestion, even in its mildest form, is not to be trifled with."

"I don't understand," said the husband. "Surely there is no mental weakness?"

"Not in the sense you mean. But she must be kept quiet. Any worry or excitement might prove disastrous following upon what has occurred. She's the apple of your eye, I know, but strong men are apt to ignore the weaknesses of their wives. My advice is negative. I need not tell you what to do, but I warn you what *not* to do. Don't be offended if I hint that, physically speaking, you are mismated. Your tremendous energy and vitality exact more than her nervous system can supply. The fact that she loves you so devotedly keeps her always on the alert, straining, so to speak, to please you, eager to do her part. You, no doubt, take her love for granted, and concern yourself with other matters, but she is absorbed in you."

During the week that followed, Damaris was confined to her bed; and Chillingworth spent all his leisure hours at her side, reading aloud her favourite books and ministering patiently to her wishes expressed and unexpressed.

Mrs. Fish paid a three days' visit and returned home. She reported, as usual, to Mrs. Skenk—

"Yes, I'm glad I went; but their ways are not my ways. Damaris is lying in the lap of luxury, drinking champagne and port wine, and Mrs. Farnum says she doesn't suffer any. The fuss made by that woman with the wig and by William Chillingworth is really ridiculous. As for the prince, he acts like a worm. That Miss Fabian just tramples on him,

poor thin thing. And I reckon Damaris has been kind to him, for he said some of the sweetest things to me about her. And she's caught the brother, who's a disgrace, Mrs. Skenk, to the American people. He says the eagle is a beast of prey, and that a bird is next door to a reptile. He seemed to like to talk to me; but half the time I couldn't understand what he meant. He told me that Damaris worshipped William Chillingworth. I'm afraid that is so, and it's sinful in her. I never worshipped Mr. Fish."

"It would have made him oneasy," assented Mrs. Skenk.

"They've a French cook; and we ate four times a day. Breakfast, lunch, tea—the woman in the wig, Mrs. Skenk, took a toddy—and dinner at an hour when country folks are thinking of retiring. Then, cards for money. Mr. Fabian offered to teach me poker; but I spoke so sharply to the young man that he covered his face with both hands."

"Maybe," said Mrs. Skenk, profoundly interested in these details—"maybe, Mis' Fish, your word in season has driven out Satan."

"I reckon not," replied the widow, shaking her head. "I hate to say it, but I think he hid his face because he was laughing."

"I'd ought to have thought o' that," said Mrs. Skenk.

Both these worthy women agreed that eating, drinking, and making merry at unhallowed hours were not to be sanctioned by godly persons. The

devil—so averred Mrs. Skenk—was no stranger beneath the ancient roof of the del Pliegos. She was surprised that William Chillingworth did not give him battle.

“He’s changing,” said Mrs. Fish, sharply—“changing for the worse. I can see that his mind is set on the things of this world, and the glory thereof. He wears his swallow-tail every night, and doesn’t ask a blessing before or after meals.”

“Is he selling much land?” asked the practical Mrs. Skenk.

“Yes, and at good prices.”

Business, indeed, was booming, but Chillingworth never mentioned his sale-book to Damaris. Behind love and pity and wholesome respect for the doctor’s advice gibbered the wife’s strictures of his methods, the knowledge that she had tasted his well-pickled principles, and found them of inferior quality. He mentioned the matter one day to Mrs. Corny.

“Damaris,” he said carelessly, “is peculiar in some ways, almost un-American. She has got a bee into her bonnet which, perhaps, you could chase out.”

He was sensible that this cigarette-smoking, slang-speaking dame exercised no little influence over Damaris.

“Describe the insect,” said Mrs. Corny, good-naturedly. “I’m not much of an entomologist, and bees sting sometimes, if you interfere with them.”

He recited his grievance, as Mrs. Corny smoked.

"I agree with your wife," she said coolly, when he had laid all the facts before her. "You see, you approach the matter from the pagan and she from the Christian point of view. She holds that you should give the settler as much for his dollar as you reasonably can; you and Dennis Fabian propose to give the poor devil as little as he can be persuaded to take."

"The land is worth more than we ask for it," he said hotly. "Our brains have enhanced these values, our money, our energy. We are entitled to all the profits."

"Time will adjust your claim, not I," said Mrs. Corny. "If these people prosper, you and Fabian may be able to justify these big prices. If they fail, the responsibility will rest with you."

"With them, you mean. I've shown them what can be done."

"You might show a monkey how to bake bread, but he would certainly starve if you left him alone with the raw materials. My dear friend, don't deceive yourself. I've always respected Dennis Fabian for one thing. He says that within the limits of the law he proposes to do what he pleases. The individual, according to his philosophy, is supreme. There's no cant about that. But"—she smiled—"in your pamphlet, you pose as a philanthropist, eh? You want to help the people; one spoonful for them and three for yourself. Then you appeal to others to justify the division. And, of course, every person has a different theory. Damaris

thinks one spoonful—a salt-spoonful—not enough. I think so too. A lot of this land will come back to you. Possibly you don't care. Before that evil hour you will have sold the other ranches. The men who will lose their land, their improvements, and five years' labour, will curse Fabian and Chillingworth; but by that time you may be operating in New York. You're cut out physically and mentally to make a big pile. Go ahead and make it; but don't pose as a benefactor of mankind."

Chillingworth resented this plainness of speech, but was too "cute" to bandy words with Mrs. Corny. All women, he reflected, were illogical. He proposed to add twenty millions to the assessed valuation of San Lorenzo county, and about five thousand persons. If he could not pose as a benefactor, who could? These things must be looked at from a distance—panoramically, not fussed over with a microscope. If a few poor devils did fail, what of it? They would make way for others.

Mrs. Corny chuckled wickedly when the Napoleon of Real Estate turned his broad back upon her twinkling eyes, which, although short-sighted, saw so much farther than her friends supposed.

"I hate phylacteries," she muttered, and lit another cigarette.

But she proved better than her word. That same afternoon she distilled for the wife's benefit a few drops of worldly wisdom.

"Women," she observed, snapping at a favourable opportunity, "are too introspective. They refuse

to take the world as they find it. They won't travel along the line of least resistance. What fools we are !”

“I'm sure you're not a fool,” said Damaris, “but I fear that I am. I can't help comparing what is with what ought to be.”

“What ought to be,” repeated Mrs. Corny. “Do you think you know at your age what ought to be? Do you dare to lay down the law? Of course you do. American girls have nothing to learn. Humanity in all its phases is an open book to them, isn't it? Oh, the conceit of youth! How old are you? Yes, nineteen. And you know what ought to be.”

She laughed, and Damaris blushed. Then, suddenly, the laughter died out of Mrs. Corny's expressive face, and she became as solemn as Heraclitus.

“My dear”—she laid her plump hand upon Damaris's wrist—“in all matters that concern others, suspend judgment. Ignorance wrecks the lives of most women, and the blatant conceit of the nineteenth-century girl, ascending to heaven from erotic novels and newspapers, is the measure of that ignorance. Our mothers were ignorant of many things, and knew their ignorance; we know little more than they, but we think ourselves wise.”

“We cannot help making comparisons, Mrs. Corny.”

“The straits of comparison! I pity the woman who is tossed about in those troubled waters! Comparisons, Damaris, are as upsetting to our sex as that horrid bit of sea between Dover and Calais. There

ought to be a law passed forbidding the manufacture of comparisons except by trained thinkers. Bless me! I nearly went into a decline when I was your age contrasting my pug nose with the noses of other girls. One day a nice Frenchman told me that he thought mine was the finest American nose he had ever seen. I thought he was laughing at me. Not a bit of it. He explained that the charm lay in the fact that I did not use it to talk through. When the average American girl is not talking through her nose, she is generally talking through her hat; and I don't know which is the worst habit."

"If the hat's a becoming one," said Damaris, "the offender is forgiven. Seriously though, what are we to do?"

"Study our neighbours and ourselves. It's infinitely amusing, and what makes life worth living to a great many persons. But, as I say, suspend judgment of others. Abuse yourself instead. When you are in a position to know all the facts in a special case, the constitution of the individual who is arraigned, his temperament, his habits, his early training; when you have thoroughly looked up the family records for two or three generations, and satisfied yourself that the evidence is not to be impugned—then, my dear, throw a rock at the sinner, but let it be a very small one."

They were sitting upon the *varandal*. Damaris was stretched at full length upon a sofa; Mrs. Corny, who despised needlework, was making an artificial fly, a hybrid between a coachman and a cochabundy,

wherewith to tickle the palates of the trout in the San Lorenzo creek. In the *patio* some humming-birds were hovering round the Castilian roses, the soft buzz of their wings falling gratefully upon the ear. To this accompaniment the fountain sang its song, while the crickets in the tiles shrilled applause. Joan and Casanegra were fishing for *barracudas*; Reginald was shooting quail.

"I'm going to tell you my story," said Mrs. Corny, softly, adjusting a tiny white wing. "The fountain, I dare say, has listened to many a tale longer than mine."

The eyes of Damaris were eloquent of interest and gratitude.

"My people, my dear, were stiff and starched New Yorkers. The Van Cortlandts, in my father's opinion, were a race apart, set up by an all-wise Providence above the common herd as a bright and shining example of what a knickerbocker family can be, and ought to be. Each man and woman with whom my parents came in contact was weighed in the Van Cortlandt scales and generally found wanting. The principles of criticism were instilled into me before I was out of pinafores, and I aired them freely. An aunt of mine has often said that I was a particularly odious child. I came out at a tremendously swell ball, and six weeks later fell in love."

"Ah!" said Damaris.

"With the wrong man, my dear—a prig! He had some of our blood in his veins. Well, we became engaged; and then I jilted him for the right man—

who wasn't a prig, and who hadn't a great-great-grandfather! There was an awful row, and I was packed off to Paris with a tag round my neck—*damaged*. The young man—he was a charming fellow—followed me, and persuaded me to run away with him, but—but I didn't."

"Why?"

"Ah, why? Because I was still a Van Cortlandt, Damaris, a slave to inherited prejudice. I agreed to bolt; but at the very last moment I wrecked two lives, because——"

She paused, sighing, and let the fly fall unfinished from limp fingers.

"Dear Mrs. Corny, I'm sure you had a strong reason."

"I thought it strong at the time. I found that we couldn't be married in Paris; the French laws were too strict. And this illustrates, my dear, a girl's sense of proportion. Although I was willing and eager to trust my lover with my whole life, I was such a coward that I refused to trust him with my person for twenty-four hours. Now, put yourself in the man's place. He was young, clever, rich, and a New Yorker. He knew what my upbringing had been—how I had sat enthroned on the conventionalities—and, knowing this, he should have made allowances. He should have laughed and waited. But he was furious, and looked at my scruples from a man's point of view. He said that I doubted his honour, and raved like a lunatic. You must remember that he was really in love. Yes; he called me

names, swore horribly, and frightened me out of my wits. We did not meet again for years."

"And what became of him, Mrs. Corny?"

"He's alive, a successful lawyer, one of the most brilliant pleaders at the New York bar, and the most miserable man of my acquaintance. He married a doll, and I—well, I married Mr. Sparling. He was twice my age, and I told him that my heart was dead. He was good enough to say that he wanted my head, and I gave it to him. We were comrades—nothing more. Before he died he told me that he'd left me his money, and that he hoped I would spend it."

"Is that all?" said Damaris, overpowered by the anticlimax.

"Not quite. The moral remains, but it's so obvious: Trust the man you love wholly, or not at all. In small matters agree to disagree."

"How is one to determine what is a small matter?"

"Most matters are small taken by themselves, large merely in relation to possible consequences. My refusal to trust myself alone with a man for a day and a night was nothing in itself—a natural result of girlish inexperience—but it cost me my lover. His angry protestations would soon have cooled, but they cost him a wife."

"But"—Damaris hesitated, and then continued boldly, "there must arise occasions when it becomes one's duty to speak out strongly."

"A wise woman," said Mrs. Corny, "gains her

ends by what she leaves unsaid. Speaking out, nine times out of ten, leads to not speaking at all. And each quarrel, my dear, between persons who truly love, is another milestone on that dreary road that leads from heaven to hell."

Soon after Chillingworth came in, and took Mrs. Corny's chair. She wondered if her words had fallen upon barren ground, and after a brisk walk along the beach decided the question in the negative. But the days that followed bred new apprehensions. She could not dispute the tender affection that Chillingworth bore his wife, nor the passionate love Damaris manifested in return, but she was sensible that a barrier had raised itself between them, and was growing in size daily. Damaris recovered her strength very slowly, and the delay proved a source of constant irritation to the strong, active man. The atmosphere of a sick room is intolerable to some temperaments, and Chillingworth returned home of necessity at an hour in the afternoon when his wife's spirits were at zero, and when he craved air and exercise. Instead of a gallop across country, or an hour's fishing and boating, he felt constrained to carry Damaris to her room, and sit beside her, not too near, for she had conceived a whimsical belief that the strong sapped the vitality of the weak, but within a radius of six feet. Chillingworth tried to make due allowance for nervousness and irritability, and preserved in his wife's presence an impassivity that deceived neither her nor Mrs. Corny. Indeed, they entreated him to ride and shoot with the others, but he obstinately

refused to leave his post ; and the poor little invalid understood very well that duty, not pleasure, tied him to her apron-strings. The pathos of the situation appealed to Mrs. Corny, but experience is impotent in such cases.

Chillingworth asked himself savagely whither they were drifting, and could find no answer. Thunder was in the air, but the skies, upon examination, seemed clear.

Damaris, despite the port wine and stout, began to lose flesh and colour. Her husband's depression increased inversely in proportion as the precious pounds dwindled.

"What's the matter with her?" he growled out to Mrs. Corny.

"What's the matter with you, my friend?"

"Worry. This anæmia is infectious. I'm limp as a rag."

"And it reacts on her. Brace up, you great—big—baby!"

Finally, Nature played one of her mad pranks with this infant of thirty-five. He was sitting one afternoon alone in his office, out of tune with life, and spent with the exasperating sense of failure—failure to adjust two lenses of different focal length and angle. Suddenly Joan entered, radiant in the samite of a famous tailor, her red hair gleaming light and laughter in her eyes—orbs into which no son of Adam could gaze with impunity.

"Casanegra is sulky," she announced, pausing upon the threshold; "so I've come to chat

with Napoleon. They call you Napoleon, don't they?"

"Sit down," he said, smiling. "I'll sell you a piece of land."

She wandered round the office, looking at the maps of the San Julian; on these the lots sold were coloured yellow.

"Not much left," she remarked.

"Not fifteen thousand acres. In two months I'll open the campaign across the mountains."

He alluded to the coast range. The lands that he and Fabian controlled lay in the Salinas Valley.

"You will cross the Alps, eh, and exchange the curule chair of a consul for the throne of an emperor? I salute you."

This chaff provoked a frown. She sat down and pulled off her gloves, exposing finely modelled hands, long-fingered and capable—the hands of a Diana. She wore no rings in the country and no trinkets.

"I wonder," she said slowly, "if we shall ever meet again."

"I—I hope so," he answered vaguely.

The windows of the office were open, and the air, alive with quivering motes, was heavy with the scent of ripe apples and pears rotting undisturbed in the old orchard of the del Pliegos. From the hill behind the *adobe* came the shrilling of the grasshoppers, from the Pacific its eternal lullaby. Outside, the landscape was flooded with a golden

haze, through which the distant peaks loomed pink and rosy.

"O land of the lotos," she murmured, "I shall be sorry to bid you good-bye!"

"Do you expect to live and die in Italy, Miss Fabian?"

"To live there—yes, of course. Don't talk of dying on a day like this. How can you sit there so quietly? Don't you feel that this soft, sensuous air is charged with electricity? I should like to sing and dance, to make merry! And you loll at ease with your square Yankee face looking as solemn and respectable as an undertaker's! I told Casanegra five minutes ago that I wished he would hide himself, as I proposed to take off my clothes and run up and down the sands. He was so scandalized! The poor fellow is as literal as a Scotchman. But you understand me. Your eyes are beginning to twinkle. Do you know, I believe this country is enchanted. These woods and hills must be full of dryads and fauns. Perhaps they are haunted by the ghosts of the del Pliegos and their friends. Let us saddle up and go for a long ride. A gallop will do you good."

"I don't like to leave home," he muttered irresolutely. The desire to consent was irresistible.

"Pooh! You are not Napoleon. You are too fond of partridges."

The allusion was wasted. He asked for an explanation. She laughed disdainfully.

"Come with me," she murmured. "Ah! I knew

you couldn't refuse. Mrs. Corny is with your wife; Casanegra is smoking with Reginald; and it is five minutes past four."

Half an hour later they were in the saddle. As they rode side by side out of the old stone corral Joan laughed defiantly. She had encountered the prince in the *patio*, and sharp words had passed between them.

"You are going to ride?" he had asked, glancing askance at her holland habit.

"Yes; you would not let me take off my clothes, you know."

"Joan, you would oblige me by not making such jokes; they smack of the *coulisses*!"

"The *coulisses*! Have you been behind the scenes? Oh, Paolo, how you have deceived me! I am shocked, disillusioned!"

He turned curtly upon his heel, swearing softly. Joan and he had already come to the parting of the ways. And their wedding-day was set. Her trousseau was on its way from Paris. The marriage had been already solemnized in a thousand newspapers, and could not be dissolved without grievous scandal. No wonder that he swore!

Chillingworth kissed his wife, and advised her of his proposed jaunt. A ride, he said, would brace him up. She listened with ill-concealed impatience, for she was weak and weary after an unusually oppressive afternoon.

"Go by all means, if you want to."

Recalling these words, he echoed Joan's laugh,

and spurred his horse down the hill. The animals, short of exercise, plunged joyously. Joan laughed again as the sea-breeze struck her face.

"Faster," she cried, "faster!"

They were racing along the smooth sands, neck to neck, intoxicated with life and motion. The gulls were screaming and scolding overhead; the big breakers rolled in majestically, bowed to law, broke with thundering protest, and foamed sibilant to the horses' hoofs.

"Glorious, glorious!" shouted the girl.

They pulled up where the San Lorenzo creek empties itself into the bay, and forded the shallow stream at a walk, the water rising to the saddle girths. A sand bar, fifty yards higher up, formed the western boundary of a small lagoon protected by dunes from the breeze. Here, rippling the placid surface of the lake, the trout were leaping, their iridescent scales sparkling in the sunlight; upon the eastern shore were masses of *tule*, and willows bending to kiss their silvery reflections; to the right lay the marshes overgrown with salt-grass, and beyond these more dunes, the crests encarmined, the hollows translucent with purple shadows.

A cañon, or rather a cañada, was slowly ascended, and a hog-back reached. Here they halted to breathe the horses, while Chillingworth pointed out the natural boundaries of the ranch. Far away in the northern horizon a reek of smoke challenged attention, a grey pillar, an ominous symbol of destruction.

"By Heaven!" exclaimed Chillingworth, "the ranch is afire!"

The girl watching him saw his face suddenly set. For ten seconds she held her breath, spellbound by curiosity. For the first time in her life she saw a strong man face to face with a stupendous emergency, a crisis that exacted all the virile qualities—judgment, action, audacity. She knew what was at stake. A fire starting in the north-western corner of the San Julian, with the wind behind it, a wind already increasing in strength and volume, would sweep the ranch from end to end. The new fences of the settlers, their houses, their barns, their lumber, all their household gods, must be utterly destroyed unless the march of the flames were stayed!

Then Chillingworth turned to her, a steely light in his blue eyes, the light of battle.

"Miss Fabian," he said quietly, "this fire has been lighted by a man I should have expelled from this county, a bitter enemy. He knows what he is doing. There has been no fog for a week, no wind to-day, and a tropical sun. The grass is dry as tinder, and as inflammable. A catastrophe is imminent! Do you understand? I see you do. Can I count upon you to do a man's work for one hour?"

"Yes," she panted, her eyes flashing with excitement.

"He has waited for the wind," continued Chillingworth, as he tightened the girth of Joan's saddle.

"Nothing can stop the fire but a back-fire. And there is only one place on the ranch—that divide yonder—where a back-fire would be of service. We must ride for our lives to get there in time!"

"I'm ready," she said. "You lead; I'll follow."

"Sit back in the saddle; give your horse his head; steer him straight down the hills. Now!"

As the word left his lips, he pressed his big spurs into the sorrel's flanks, and shot at a wild gallop down the steep slope in front of them. Joan set her teeth hard, and cut her horse twice across the shoulders. The beast gave a vicious twist and wriggle that might have unseated a good rider; then it settled into a long stride, and raced headlong after the sorrel. In front were loose rocks, slippery stretches of turf, squirrel holes, broken branches of trees, but Chillingworth never drew rein, nor did the woman who rode behind him. On they rushed, and on! At the bottom of the hill yawned a gulch, ten feet across and as many in depth. Chillingworth drove his horse at it with a yell, and cleared it. Upon the far side, glancing over his shoulder, he saw Joan not a dozen lengths behind, and gnawed his lip with fear as she neared the obstacle. If her horse shied, or stumbled, or failed to leap the chasm, nothing could avert a frightful accident! He heard the sharp crack of her whip, caught a glimpse of the horse high in the air, his limbs well under him, and breathed again. Joan was over! Ahead stretched a level valley, up which they sped, Chillingworth still in the lead; then another hill, and another

slope steeper than the first to descend. If the horses could stand this terrific pace, they would reach the divide in time. Already the pillar of smoke had burst, and now darkened the northern skies. Down the wind came the crash of falling pines and the fierce crackling of the flames. A thousand acres were ablaze!

To Joan the minutes whirled by, like the trees she passed during that mad gallop, and her pulse beat faster and harder than the hoofs of the stout little horse beneath her. For thought ran riot in pursuit of this man—this *man* whose proportions had become god-like! Upon the divinity her eyes were fixed in unconscious adoration. She could hear his quiet voice, see his steady glance, feel in every fibre the magnetism of a hero. She wondered if he spared a thought to her, and answered the question humbly in the negative. Those with work to do must hold idle fancy at bay till that work is done. And she was right. Chillingworth had forgotten her—and Damaris—and himself! The problem of what to do, and how to do it, was still unsolved.

At last the panting horses reached their goal, and Chillingworth flung himself from the saddle loosened the cinch, and tore out the blanket.

“Tie the horses,” he said to Joan, “and come back to me.”

She took the sorrel's bridle obediently, as Chillingworth drew a bundle of matches from his pocket and bent to the ground. When she returned, the

back-fire was started and burning merrily. Chillingworth gave her half the blanket and instructions.

"Keep that fire under control," he said curtly. "If it gets the better of you the ranch is gone."

He hurried off to start another fire, as she nodded assent and comprehension. To the right and left bristled rocks bare of vegetation; between them lay a strip of grass three hundred yards long and fifty wide; this must be burned bare as a board. Below the sage brush was shrivelling and hissing as the grim battalions crept up the hills. Joan knew that these must converge at the point where she stood. If they touched the dry bunch-grass at her feet, no human power could save those smiling foothills and plains behind her.

Very slowly the flames of the back-fire advanced against the wind; again and again a spark sped by, borne by the treacherous breeze; as often she turned to beat it out, whirling the blanket till her arms ached and her senses reeled. To the right she could see Chillingworth as he raced hither and thither—a demon of energy, black with soot, fierce-eyed, naked to the waist. He had torn off coat, waistcoat, shirt, and vest, using them as extinguishers, not daring to trust to the blanket alone. If a miniature fire started, he would fling his coat upon it, stifling the flames; upon another black and widening circle would be hurled the blanket; upon a third plague-spot the waistcoat! Then the garments would be snatched up and placed elsewhere. Joan felt the pupils of her eyes burning,

and knew that her tongue was swelling; then she smiled, wondering what she looked like, and thought of Mrs. Corny and her kodak. The roar of the approaching flames was in her ears, and the ashes began to fall thickly and softly—flakes of destruction. Chillingworth rushed up and dragged her back.

“We’ve done it,” he said hoarsely, pointing triumphantly to the broad black ribbon that barred the pass. “We’ve done it, by God! But the work is not over. Run!”

He had thrown across his shoulders the blanket, but Joan marked the magnificent muscles of his chest and neck, the triceps and biceps of his arms, the lithe loins, and symmetrical legs. She recalled a *discobulus* in a Florentine gallery, and decided that Chillingworth might have posed for the sculptor. He was certainly superb.

“Now,” he said, as they reached the grass line, “stand here, and mark where the hot ashes fall. The supreme moment has come!”

He took up his own position about thirty yards distant; and in dogged silence they awaited the last charge. Chillingworth—who doubts this?—was considering the task not yet accomplished; Joan, heedless of toil, fatigue, and danger, thought only of the man.

She had met at last—her master!

Then the battle began once more as flaming cinders were whirled across the safety belt. Most of these fell short or extinct, but the stamping out of

the few that passed the border taxed the utmost strength of man and woman. For the heat was now intense, like the blast of a furnace. Yet Joan, sustained by Chillingworth's cheers, faced the leaping tongues of fire without flinching, imperilling complexion, hair, eyelashes, and brows—the gifts the gods had given her, which she valued above her father's millions. Twice her holland habit was alight. Once a malignant spark settled hissing in the coils of her hair. Gloves were in holes. Riding-boots were cracked and scorched. Who, seeing her in such plight, would have recognized Joan Fabian?

When the golden rain ceased and the danger was over, these two, who had fought hand to hand a famous fight, drew together, and gazed proudly into each other's soiled and blackened faces. The muscles of both were twisted and cramped; their aching, bloodshot eyes gleamed beneath scorched brows; their cheeks still blazed with the blood of battle; both, too, were thirsty as Dives in torment. Yet they were happy!

"Well," said Chillingworth, the words falling curtly from between split and parched lips, "well, you have played the man!"

"But watching *you*," she replied, still panting, "I never forgot that I was a woman."

She raised her eyes to his and smiled. Such a smile may have dimpled the face of Faustine when she murmured homage into the ears of some gladiator.

Then she staggered and would have fallen, but he

caught her in his arms, and bore her to a leafy shelter below the crest of the divide, where there were shade and water and a carpet of moss fringed with ferns. As he laid her down their eyes met for the second time, and again she smiled.


“Joan,” he said hoarsely, “you——”

She pressed her lips to his.

“I love you,” she whispered; “I love you.”

CHAPTER IX.

"IS WRIT IN MOODS AND FROWNS AND WRINKLES
STRANGE."

 HILLINGWORTH and Joan rode slowly home in the gloaming. The colour was out of the landscape, which lay grey and grim before them, and the voice of the Pacific seemed to be intoning a dirge, the elegy of a day that had dawned dimpled with smiles and had died in agony, withered by wind and flame.

Mrs. Corny met them in the *patio*, and marked a change upon their faces; a subtle essence, so volatile that it escaped analysis, impregnated the pair. They were conscious themselves of a physical reaction, of a languor strangely bitter-sweet, suffusive and diffusive. With an effort Joan rallied her energy. She could read in Mrs. Corny's bright eyes a question; the air, indeed, seemed alive with notes of interrogation.

"Don't stare so," she said, with an abrupt laugh. "We look very funny, I've no doubt. Did Casanegra think I had bolted? He will bolt himself if he sees me now. Yes, we've been fighting

fire. Come to my room, and I'll tell you all about it."

She ran lightly away, and Mrs. Corny followed, a frown upon her face. The fire in the hills had advertised itself; the back-fire had published the presence of Chillingworth; but the wise woman surmised that something less substantial than a pine forest, but quite as inflammable, had been burning also, and she was curious as to the extent and nature of the damage done. Passing the door of Damaris's room, she remembered the invalid's anxiety, and laid it low with a phrase.

"Your husband, my dear, has performed prodigies of valour. Don't be scared when you see him. He's done to a turn; but you can salute him as a conqueror!"

When the party met an hour later in the dining-room, a clever maid, plenty of soap and hot water, and a new tea-gown, had banished all traces of fire from Joan's person, but Chillingworth exhibited scars. His health was drunk with acclamation; and Joan, with more wit than discretion, declaimed a paean of praise, to which the hero lent but a sullen ear. As he mumbled his food with split and swollen lips, he cursed passionately the flames that had destroyed so little and so much. From time to time he encountered the soft eyes of Damaris seeking his glance; and after dinner she sat beside him, and, unperceived, placed her small hand, now so white and thin, into his massive palm. He squeezed it almost convulsively, and felt the

answering quiver of love. Then he wished that he had never been born, and abruptly left the room upon a plea of business.

"You needn't go," said Reginald. "The settlers have taken precautions. They're patrolling the hills, and to-morrow they propose to hunt down Red Pat."

"He'll not escape this time," Chillingworth replied grimly.

A silence fell upon the group as he left him. Then Mrs. Corny commended his energy.

"He's worn out with fatigue," she said; "but he won't neglect business duties. He'd have made a great general. Mrs. Chillingworth is a proud woman to-night. And Joan is inflated with conceit."

She fired off these sentences, and marked their impact on the several targets. Casanegra pulled his thin moustache reflectively—a superfluity of energy, as manifested by this big northerner, was a distinct menace, he decided, to his own peace of mind; Reginald Fabian caught the Roman's melancholy eye and shrugged his shoulders—hero-worship was not a cult he affected; Joan pouted openly—Chillingworth had departed; Damaris sighed and smiled.

"Letty is jealous," said Joan; "she would like to fight a fire successfully herself."

"Mrs. Corny," observed the prince, "has had experience. To my knowledge she has turned the hose upon the flames more than once."

This was a graceful acknowledgment of the wise woman's tact in restoring a sorely tempted wife to a husband's arms. Mrs. Corny had happily averted a grave scandal.

"That might have been a big blaze," said Joan. "Letty certainly covered herself with glory. But she had a weak little fool to deal with; the flame was soon snuffed out. You don't think, do you, that I should have listened to your sermonizing?"

She challenged her friend's glance.

"You need a good ducking," retorted Mrs. Corny; "and I'd like to give it to you."

"Is it indiscreet to ask what Mrs. Corny did?" asked Damaris.

She was duly sworn to secrecy and told the story, which begat a discussion pertinent to the present narrative. Reginald Fabian voiced some heterodox views upon the sanctity of the marriage tie; these were impugned by Casanegra and denounced by Mrs. Corny.

"I think that a woman who lives with a man whom she knows to be unfaithful, or a drunkard, or a bully, is injuring and insulting her whole sex. She is simply putting a premium on the vices that make women's lives intolerable. To protest is fatuity; acquiescence is infamous; reformation, ridiculous! No; the remedy must be drastic. Nothing serves but the knife. Cut yourself loose."

"And bleed to death," said Mrs. Corny. "Most wives are without means of support; they may have children—are they to leave them?—and there is

public opinion, which cannot be ignored. We're discussing a subject worn threadbare by theory and practice. The average woman dare not leave her husband, except under the wing of the law, and the law takes cognizance of only flagrant cases. The great majority must suffer. Let wives choose husbands with more care than they take in matching ribbons. Make divorce easy, and a silly girl will think the choice of a mate less important than the selection of an Easter bonnet. She can discard either if it doesn't suit. Getting married will be esteemed easier than getting photographed."

"I'm not talking of the average woman," said Reginald. "I suppose Jill must stick to Jack if she has a lot of brats and no money of her own. Frankly, I don't concern myself with the masses. I went slumming once with a fellow, and couldn't eat a square meal for a week afterwards. I'm talking about particular instances. That little wife you pitchforked back into respectability had a head as soft as her heart. You did the right thing, Mrs. Corny, but a clever woman can't be kissed and cuddled into forgiveness of wrongs. I say that a man would be more careful how he offended if he knew that his wife would contemptuously leave him under due provocation. She needn't air her grievances in the courts. Let her live her own life, see her own friends, paddle her own canoe. I know women who've done it. Are they miserable? Most certainly not."

"A wife should not leave her husband," said Casanegra, coldly.

"I agree with Reggie," said Joan. "Don't scowl, Paolo; you take the prehistoric view, of course. What does Mrs. Chillingworth think?"

Thus appealed to, Damaris answered. Her quick wits detected an ironical note in Joan's careless question and an illusive mockery in her green eyes; Casanegra's chilly negative provoked her; Mrs. Corny's staccato common sense fell harshly upon Reginald's sympathetic periods. The young man was blessed with a singular charm of voice, *une voix de l'eau qui court*, and he never became heated in debate. His manner with women was perfect. Courteous but not effusive, supple not servile, he pleased without obtruding anxiety to please. Since her illness he had been most attentive, anticipating her wishes, proffering small services, sending for new books, manifesting in a thousand delicate ways his homage and allegiance. She had never met a gentleman of this kidney; the species is not to be found in the provinces. It is true that he lacked the most enchanting characteristic of youth—spontaneity. Theories upon all subjects bubbled from his lips with sparkling effervescence; but he confessed modestly that his cellar was stocked with foreign vintages, and always added that he had no palate for home-made wine, the pure juice of the grape. "I collect other folk's ideas," he would say, "and bottle them. I don't label them with my own name, my dear Mrs. Chillingworth. I'm that rare bird, a daw, who admits that his plumage is borrowed. You see, I'm honest." It was not

difficult to persuade an inexperienced woman, still in her teens, of his honesty and high sense of honour. Handsome eyes, a soft voice, and the gift of the gab, are cheap credentials, but they entitle the bearer to consideration, especially in California. Damaris had listened with keen interest to this champion of unhappy wives, not forgetting, perhaps, that he had sworn himself to be her own true knight. Since the fainting-fit, not an ardent word had passed his lips. He knew the value of silence, *tacens loquitur*.

"I think," she said, with emphasis, "that in individual cases where the wife can support herself she is justified in leaving her husband. I would sooner sell matches in the streets than live with a man whom I had ceased to respect. If I had children, I might sacrifice myself for them, but if I were free, I should go."

None had noticed that Chillingworth returned at the moment that his wife began to speak. He stood in the deep doorway, his face in shadow, and waited for the next words.

"Respect," echoed Mrs. Corny, "is hard to define. A man has so many sides to his character."

"You must respect him as a whole. The good in him must outweigh the bad. To me the unpardonable sin is insincerity, to discover that you've been married under false pretences. I could forgive a drunkard, a gambler, or a bad-tempered brute who beat me; I could go on living with him, hoping and praying that patience would be justified;

but I could never pardon deliberate falsehood. I loathe a Judas! There are men in San Lorenzo who never leave their wives without a kiss, and the women accept their lords' caresses, knowing"—her voice trembled with indignation—"knowing, I say, that those kisses are shared with others. God in heaven! of what clay are these wives made?"

The passion in her clear voice vibrated through the room. Then Chillingworth stepped quietly forward and sat down. Mrs. Corny was unable to determine whether he had just arrived or not; the expression of his face indicated great weariness, a mental lassitude, in strange contrast to the man's normal sprightliness. When he spoke his voice had a muffled intonation.

"You're dead beat," said Mrs. Corny. "Damaris, take your hero to bed."

When the pair had departed, Casanegra dropped a bomb. He wished to be informed of Joan's plans. The visit, he pointed out, had lasted a fortnight longer than the time set. He had engagements to meet in other parts of the state. The quail were thinned out; the yellow-tail had left the bay. He suggested an immediate exodus.

"Nonsense," said Joan, in her most masterful manner. "We've had a glorious time, and the fun is by no means over. If you won't cancel your stupid engagements——"

"I don't cancel engagements," he replied quietly, "not even when they have been entered into stupidly."

"I vote we stay on for another fortnight," said Reginald.

"I was going to say, when Paolo interrupted me, that he can run away if he wants to. I shall remain here."

Mrs. Corny distilled a thimbleful of oil, and urged a compromise. She had promised Dennis Fabian not to forsake Joan, and to smooth out, if possible, the creases in that young lady's high temper. She was under obligations to the land baron, who had acted as one of the executors of her late husband's will, and she knew that Joan's marriage with Casanegra was regarded by the millionaire as supremely important and expedient. He had spoken out very plainly.

"My dear Letty, I count upon your tact and good sense. It's time that Joan settled down, and I'm glad she is going to marry a foreigner. In Rome she'll have to behave herself, you understand? American women are adaptable, and I've no doubt that she'll make an excellent wife. I shan't be happy till I see her at the altar. Her name has got into the newspapers—that Hardcastle affair was very unfortunate—and if this match were broken off, I should take it most bitterly to heart. Of course, such a catastrophe could only be brought about by her own wilfulness."

Bearing these words in mind, Mrs. Corny persuaded Joan to meet the prince half way. The day of departure was fixed before the party sat down to poker, and the beauty made herself agreeable

to her future husband. Sunning himself in her radiant smiles, he forgot the *contretemps* of the afternoon. His blood was certainly very thin.

In the next room Chillingworth was lying at length upon the sofa; Damaris, in a chair beside him, cooed love and sympathy. She insisted upon bathing his head with eau de Cologne water, and her fingers lingered tenderly in the thick curls. Now and again she would bend down and kiss his forehead with cool lips; he had refused her his mouth, saying that it was in no condition to receive caresses or to give them. The little woman, not free from headache herself, was pleased to minister to the hero in his hour of weakness. She had never seen him in pain; he had drawn no drafts upon a treasury of pity; these, the first, were honoured in full.

"My darling," she whispered, "I fear I was cross this afternoon. You will forgive me, won't you? I felt jealous. I begrudged you to Joan Fabian, even for an hour. And when I heard that the ranch was afire, and knew that you were there, in danger of your life perhaps, I made all sorts of good resolutions. Oh, Will, I've so much to reproach myself with! I've been wicked and silly. I thought you had ceased to care for me, that I bored you. It was so kind of you to give up all your leisure to me, and I never even thanked you. And pride prevented me from taking back what I said about your business. I spoke hastily, dear, and my cruel words must have cut you to the quick.

What right had I to judge you? You forgive me? Don't speak, if it hurts you. Just nod your head."

He nodded, and she continued to pour forth her simple hopes and fears. Each tender word stabbed him to the quick, each kiss seared his soul. He asked himself, he, the brave man, if he dared fling the truth in her teeth. No; Joan had given her honour into his keeping. He could not confess his own sins without incriminating her. And Damaris, the fiend whispered, was still weak; the doctor had warned him to be careful of this sensitive plant. Should he crush it as it lifted its delicate petals to the light? No.

But the ordeal determined the measure of his guilt. In the white light of a pure soul he saw himself and shuddered.

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Tom Mudgit, who now held the seals of the sheriff's office, rode up to the *adobe* early the next morning. Public opinion had heretofore justified the honest fellow in leaving Red Pat alone, for big Anton testified at Cassidy's inquest that Donovan had fled at the first fire, and, under the circumstances, the district attorney was willing to temper justice with mercy, so the warrant for the Irishman's arrest was locked up in a safe. None the less, Tom, who used the safe, eyed the document from time to time, and hoped the day would dawn when he would be called upon to serve it. The new settlers upon the San Julian hinted at overt acts—the removal of monuments, the stealing of chickens, the cutting

of wire fences. These outrages warmed the sheriff's blood; but the district attorney, with a finger upon the pulse of the community, counselled patience and caution. "The settlers," said he, "will handle Pat." The firing of the ranch, however, was too serious an offence to be overlooked. Chillingworth had written a strong letter, demanding the immediate arrest of the incendiary. Violence was to be apprehended upon the part of the new-comers; law must be upheld.

So Tom Mudgit, armed with his warrant, and with a couple of deputies at his heels, rode out of San Lorenzo and down the pleasant cañon that leads to the ocean. The clock in the *sala* was striking seven when he clanked on to the *varandal*. Chillingworth and Casanegra were awaiting him. The Roman, scenting excitement, had insisted upon offering his services.

"This fellow will be lynched if you don't arrest him, Tom," said Chillingworth. "The people here are red-hot. Prince Casanegra will go with us."

Honest Tom bowed low. He had never seen a prince, and wondered how he should be addressed. He remembered that princes in books were usually entitled highness or excellency, and governed himself accordingly.

"We'll arrest him," he replied, grinning. "Call me a liar if he didn't do the plottin' an' plannin' las' time. They say he's dangerous, but I set no stock on that. He's armed, sure. An' he won't be liable to know the difference between a prince an'

an ordinary American citizen. Is his highness prepared to take the chances?"

Casanegra laughed, and intimated that some fighting would touch up a too torpid liver. Mr. Mudgit, speaking of what passed, told his friends that the prince was very "yaller," but "sporty." A few minutes later they were in the saddle, on the way to the San Simeon wilderness.

Chillingworth rode ahead, sullenly silent. The presence of the Roman annoyed him; he felt ill at ease in his company, and had urged him to stay at home. Casanegra, on the contrary, was in excellent spirits; yet he marvelled somewhat at Napoleon's spleen, knowing that the Man of Destiny—as Mrs. Corny now called him—was lord of his liver and Fortune's favoured son. Why did he frown? Listening to the adventures of Mr. Mudgit, set forth by honest Tom with infinite humour and vivacity, the Italian played carelessly with conjecture, a sorry cur that often bites the hand that fondles it. Suddenly he started and turned a shade more yellow; the teeth of the animal had met in his heart. Cardinal Casanegra, Paolo's great-uncle and the most astute of churchmen, was a manufacturer of aphorisms. Here is one: Women's smiles breed men's frowns. The young man, by nature suspicious, became assured that Joan had mothered this brood of scowls. There was a missing link between conviction and demonstration; that link he must discover. Corroborative details buzzed round his conclusions—Joan's panegyric at dinner; the love-laden glances

of the little wife, wasted upon morose, brooding eyes; her passionate impeachment of infidelity; Mrs. Corny's puzzled stare; Chillingworth's extraordinary prostration, not to be traced to physical causes alone; and, finally, his churlishness at the present moment. Why did this man shun his society, shrink from his glance, refuse to talk with him? Why—why? Obviously, because he was ashamed of himself!

The road to the outlaw's eyrie crossed the divide where fire had met and vanquished fire. Mudgit's curiosity provoked a dozen questions, answered curtly by Chillingworth. Yes, they had tied their horses to those trees yonder. Miss Fabian had stood there, close to the rocks; he had taken up his position near that charred scrub-oak.

"Yer a wonder," said Tom, and the deputies echoed the word. "Ther's not another man in Californy could ha' done it. Not a one. I'd like mighty well to have seen ye at work. By Jing! ye must ha' bin on the jump all the time. An' the lady, too, Miss Fabian. But, o' course, she must ha' wilted pretty soon. An' when it was done, Mr. Chillingworth, what did Miss Fabian say to ye? 'Tisn't often a lady gits a chance o' seein' a strong man in his glory. What did she say?"

"Yes," said Casanegra, fixing his glittering eyes upon the hero; "what did she say?"

Chillingworth flushed, but answered readily, "We were both worn out. I told her she had played a man's part; and she replied quite simply that she had."

"That all?" said honest Tom, much disappointed.
"Wal, now, what did ye do next?"

Chillingworth, sensible of the suspicion latent in the Roman's glance, was on his guard.

"We walked back to where the horses were tied, and rode home."

As he spoke his gaze wandered to the left. Upon the blackened margin of the battleground was a clump of trees, a sylvan retreat spared by the flames. Here, as Mudgit was aware, might be found moss-covered rocks, ferns, and a tiny spring trickling from the lime-stone.

"Ye rode right home," echoed the relentless Tom.
"Didn't ye think o' restin' up by the Fairy's Well?"

"No," said the lawyer, sharply; "it was late. I forgot all about the Fairy's Well. Come, we are wasting valuable time."

He touched his horse with the spur and cantered off. The others followed, with the exception of Casanegra, who explained to the sheriff that he wished to quench his thirst at the spring, and would rejoin the party in a minute. Mudgit, however, had ridden half a mile before the prince overtook him, and marked a curious expression upon the laggard's face.

"He ain't scared sure-ly," thought Tom; "but his highness looks as if he'd bin cuddled by a grizzly. Mebbe he ain't accustomed to drink water. It does lie mighty cold on the stomach."

Casanegra routed these hypotheses by praising

the limpidity of the spring, and entering into an animated discussion in regard to the proposed capture of Red Pat. Presently they struck the regular trail leading from the new town to the head waters of the San Simeon creek. Tom yelled to Chillingworth to halt.

"D'ye see that," he exclaimed, pointing to the thick white dust indented with hoof marks. "What does it mean, Mr. Chillingworth?"

"A dozen men have been over this road," replied the lawyer, "and it means a lynching party. I told you the people were red hot. However, they may not have caught Pat."

The deputies smiled derisively. The white dust told a grim story of angry men going and *returning!*

"I guess," said Tom, reflectively, "that Red Pat's brogue was heard in hell last night."

Then they rode on in silence.

An hour later what they sought was found. At the end of a rope, attached to the bough of a sycamore, hung Red Pat, stark and discoloured. To the right the San Simeon creek lapped its way to the Pacific; to the left frowned the rocky heights that had sheltered him; not a hundred yards distant was the cave where he and Norah had passed five dreary months—where, indeed, so they learned afterwards, the outlaw had been caught black-handed, with the evidence of crime stamped upon his charred rags. The story leaked out within a fortnight; it can be told in half a dozen seconds. Justice found her victim asleep, in the arms of the faithful girl who

had shared with him hunger, solitude, and shame. From her embrace he was torn by the men whose property and lives he had imperilled. Despite her frenzied prayers and curses, he was condemned to die. In her presence, for she refused to leave him, he was executed. In a so-called civilized country, where laws are ill-administered, where juries can be bribed, where judgment is indefinitely suspended, where a condemned murderer laughs beneath the shadow of the gallows, in such a country—and in no other, thank Heaven!—these hideous tragedies are possible and justifiable.

The sheriff cut down and searched the body. Then, leaving the dead in the deputies' charge, Mudgit and Chillingworth explored the cave, and found nothing. The emerald ring, so the sheriff decided, could not possibly have been sold. Without doubt it was in Norah's possession. Of her there was no sign. Casanegra suggested that he and Chillingworth should examine other caves and cran-nies, a proposition seconded by honest Tom, who was anxious to return to San Lorenzo. To this the lawyer rather reluctantly agreed.

An hour's hunt, however, revealed no trace of the girl; and the sun was approaching the zenith. Chillingworth advised a gallop home. Casanegra held up his hand.

"I've something to say," he began quietly; "a question to ask. I recommended this search because I wished to get you alone. You have avoided me all the morning. Why?"

"I was not conscious of giving offence," answered Chillingworth, coldly. "I slept badly last night. I apprehended some violence on the part of the settlers, and my efforts yesterday have nearly knocked me out. If I've been guilty of any rudeness, forgive me."

"Why did you lie to Mudgit this morning?"

"Be careful," retorted the other, fiercely. "I take such talk from no man."

"You lied," sneered the Italian. "You did not go home after the fire. You and the woman who is my promised wife spent some time by the Fairy's Well. Do you dare to deny it?"

Chillingworth, in ignorance of the Roman's visit to the spring, at a loss to account for this authoritative statement, wishing to shield Joan, and to throw dust in the eyes of a jealous man, said—

"I do not deny it."

"Then explain," screamed Casanegra.

"A lie," said Chillingworth, slowly, his choleric blue eyes flashing defiance and dislike—"a lie, sir, is often imperative. I did not choose to gratify vulgar curiosity. I did not wish Miss Fabian's name to be linked with mine across the bar of every saloon in the county. Yes, I carried her in my arms to that spring—she was fainting with fatigue and excitement—and I threw water in her face, and did her such poor services as opportunity offered. And for this you call me to task."

His vehemence whirled into nothingness the

Italian's suspicions. Mighty is the centrifugal force of a strong man's speech!

"I beg your pardon," said Casanegra, humbly, and holding out his hand. "I entreat your pardon."

They shook hands, and mounted the horses, which bore them swiftly home. Casanegra, anxious to make amends, chatted with unusual animation about the administration of the law and kindred subjects. None the less, the picture of Joan, helpless in the arms of the hero, even if painted by Chivalry and engraved by Expediency, was not pleasant to behold. He told himself that the person of Beauty in distress was held inviolable by gentlemen, and Chillingworth certainly was a gentleman, and a most devoted husband. But he rejoiced in the thought that the days to be spent in this lotos-land were already numbered. Seven thousand miles were not too great a distance to set between a lovely woman and the Man of Destiny.

Upon arrival Chillingworth was met by Damaris, who, guessing the nature of his errand, had passed a miserable morning. Her husband's safety tempered the shock imparted by the news of Donovan's tragic end, but she reproached him tenderly for stealing away without a farewell kiss. Joan led Casanegra aside and asked for particulars. As soon as they were alone he embraced her, infusing into his caresses an ardour to which the girl turned but a cold cheek. Repelled by her indifference, he released her and stepped back a couple of paces.

"You are one of those," he said bitterly, "who receive much and give little in return."

Then he fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, and pulled out a small silver frog with diamond eyes.

"My mascotte!" exclaimed Joan. "Where did you find it? I've hunted high and low for that wretched frog. I was once told that when I lost it my luck would go with it. Where did you find it?"

"I found it," he said slowly, "by a tuft of grass, upon a bed of moss, near the Fairy's Well."

As he spoke a blush blazed upon her white skin, spreading to the very roots of her hair. The hand that took the charm was pink also, and the fingers trembled. Casanegra bowed, and turned his back upon her confusion.

His suspicions—lightly banished—returned like the tide at Mont Saint Michel, drowning magnanimity and reviving jealousy. Without a word he walked from the *sala*, passing Mrs. Corny with a grimace, half scowl, half smile. The wise woman scented a crisis, and approached Joan, pale now as any calla lily, and furiously angry.

"I hate that man!" she said to Mrs. Corny. "I hate him; and, Letty, I won't marry him. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear you, Joan. The others have ears also. For sweet reason's sake, pray speak less loudly!"

"I don't care who hears me. I won't marry that man!"

"He certainly won't marry you, if you behave like a peasant."

"He is odious—odious!"

"Will you kindly——"

"No; I've no explanations for you, Letty; none."

"Then I may infer——"

"What you please!"

The gong for luncheon drowned the last word in waves of sound. Mrs. Corny placed the girl's arm within her own, and led her to the window farthest from the door.

"My dear," she said coldly, "you promised to marry Casanegra, not because you loved him, but because he could offer you a great position and a famous name. You are not a school miss, but, upon my word, at this moment I can smell bread and butter. The prince is not Romeo, nor are you Juliet. An ardent lover, sighing and yearning, would bore you to death, but the pomp and circumstance of the Palazzo Casanegra will tickle your vanity as long as you live. I speak plainly, because I know you. You are engaged to a gentleman, a man of honour, who will respect you as long as you respect yourself—not a minute longer. You've given him cause to be jealous. Not a word! I have eyes. He has accorded you entire trust—he is a gentleman, I repeat—and with this trust you have *trifled*. I use no harsher verb. Your marriage cannot be broken off without grievous scandal; and the burden of it will fall upon your shoulders, not

upon his. Mark that! Come in to luncheon, and don't be a fool!"

Joan allowed herself to be persuaded. The allusion to bread and butter was a vital thrust. Moreover, she recognized and appreciated the fact that Mrs. Corny's advice was sound to the core, and not inspired by selfish motives. She was aware that the wise woman disapproved of international marriages, had protested publicly against them—Joan could recall a scathing article upon the subject that had appeared in the *Rostrum*—and this prejudice lent weight to her authority as a counsellor. Clearly Mrs. Corny was considering her interest.

As a matter of truth, Joan had not the monopoly of her friend's wisdom. Mrs. Corny shrewdly suspected that the happiness of Damaris and Chillingworth was at stake. The little woman had crept into her heart and filled more than a corner; the big man had pushed himself into the same place by sheer exercise of those qualities which commended him to wise and simple alike. The inexperience of the pair was really pathetic. They had put to sea in an unballasted bark which a capful of wind would suffice to upset. If Casanegra broke his moorings, the displacement of water might swamp this pretty craft, and obviously the prince was straining his cable.

Luncheon proved a dreary meal. The lynching of Red Pat obscured the atmosphere. The smell of blood tainted the talk. Mrs. Corny said afterwards that she was conscious of an impending sword.

Joan, she remarked, had recovered her self-possession; Casanegra ate in silence; Chillingworth spoke in monosyllables, and left the table in a quarter of an hour. Business, he remarked curtly, would detain him at the office till late.

The advent of one of the boatmen was hailed with mock enthusiasm. Portuguese Joe reported a school of *bonitos*. Five minutes later, Joan, Mrs. Corny, and Fabian were hastening across the sands. Damaris and the prince remained at home.

"I wish I could kill thought by killing fish," said the little woman to Casanegra, as they sat in the *patio*. "I'm haunted by Norah O'Connor. When I consider our prosperity and happiness, her misery cuts me to the quick."

"I'm glad you are happy," he said softly.

"You are happy too?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not particularly unhappy. My health is better than it was. I'm going to marry a beauty and an heiress. Happiness, some persons assure us, is to be found in the cell of Duty. That is rubbish! I'm conscious of doing my duty, but I'm not happy. To-day I feel rather bluer than usual. I must write a letter or two. Will you excuse me? Perhaps in half an hour I could persuade you to walk on the sands. The breeze begins to blow about three."

Sitting alone, she closed her eyes, and let fancy flit where it listed. The creature flew here and there, but settled, buzzard-like, in Calamity Cañon, thence not to be dislodged. Once more Damaris

stood in the shambles. Here lay Cassidy—she could hear his groans—and there the body of a horse; beneath it Tim O'Connor, his features set in a ghastly grin; farther on—the others. Would the horror of that night ever pass away? Her husband, who laughed sentiment and superstition to scorn, had said that a curse was upon Ireland, but the curse had fallen upon the helpless and the innocent—upon Norah.

While her thoughts writhed in torment, she was conscious physically of supreme peace. Upon the ancient house of the del Pliegos brooded the mystery of the past, the languor of this southern wonderland whose charm is too subtle for expression, a languor that whispers of decay. "We do not change," chant the cloudless skies. "We do not change," sing the smiling seas. "We do not change," the mountains echo. "Ye change, O mortals; not we!"

She sat there upon the smooth lawn, beneath the fig tree whose fruit had been eaten by Fremont, for nearly half an hour. Then she opened her eyes with a cruel start, knowing that she was no longer alone. Norah O'Connor stood before her, bare-footed and bare-headed. Damaris tried to rise, and fell back, paralyzed, not by fear, but by emotion.

"I've watched for the chanst to spake wid yez," said the girl, in hollow tones—tones emptied of hope, faith, and love. "Ye gave me yure clothes an' yure pity. I'd no use for aither, but I thank yez. Tell me now, d'ye love yure husband?"

"Yes," replied Damaris, fascinated by the woman's wild eyes.

"Ye belave him to be throe to ye?"

"Surely."

"But he's false—d'ye hear me?—false as Judas; an' for that, an' for what he's done to me an' mine, he must die—*die!*" she screamed. "By Pat's dead body I swore to kill him, an' I will!"

One word only smote the trembling wife. "False," she stammered; "f—false?"

"Ay; false!"

Then she spoke, not loudly, but with an intensity and rude eloquence that stormed conviction in its citadel, a loving, loyal heart, and carried it hence. She had witnessed what passed between Joan and Chillingworth in the sylvan retreat near the spring. The outlaw and she had crept down the rocky ledge to the left of the divide with the intention of firing the ranch a second time if the back-fire proved victorious. What they saw caused them to abandon their plans. In the shame of Chillingworth and Dennis Fabian's daughter lay a surer revenge. Pat, supposing his hiding-place to be unknown, had taken no precautions against the instant action of the settlers. Hope of revenge had kept him in Ireland; the same reason would have compelled him to leave it on the morrow that never dawned for him. He had wit enough to know that the story of the Fairy's Well would bring him money and protection from the press.

All this and more Norah poured into the burning

ears of Damaris. Not a detail had escaped her eye; the truth in its nudity was set forth, and could not be mistaken for falsehood.

"For yure sake," concluded Norah, "I might have spared him. Now he must die. An' I towld ye this, for I wist yez to know that I'm riddin' ye of a liar and a murdherer. He's murdhered me an' mine, an' if yure the woman I take yez to be, he's murdhered you too."

Before Damaris could reply, she turned and ran lightly from the *patio*. The stricken wife attempted to follow, staggered forward a dozen paces, and fell to her knees.

Casanegra raised her from the ground.

"You here!" she faltered. "Then——"

"I heard every word. And—and"—his lips were white, but his eyes flamed sympathy and indignation—"and I say it's a black lie! The poor wretch is crazy."

Writing in the *sala* at an open window, not a dozen feet from where Norah had stood, truth had come to him as it came to this poor little wife, and with it a sense of relief. A man likes to know the worst; a woman prefers to dally with suspicion. Casanegra had been trained in a strict school, and the discipline of early years was now vindicated. It was characteristic of him that he thought first of others, and choked down his own feelings in the presence of expediency. If he had loved Joan Fabian, such altruism would have been impossible. Of passionate love this pallid Roman was incapable.

The analysis of motives is an invidious and profitless task; but doubtless the chivalrous impulse that forced a truthful man to lie was inspired by instinct—the instinct of the aristocrat who suffers all things gladly in defence of his order. A great name must not be trailed in the dust of a scandal. His marriage could be broken off later, quietly, after due deliberation with Mrs. Cōrny. Meantime, the young wife must be pacified. As a man of the world, he could even find excuses for Chillingworth. At the same time he was sensible of an ardent wish to shoot him like a dog.

"Yes; crazy," he repeated emphatically. "Your husband told me that he carried Joan to the spring. Seeing her in his arms fired the coarse imagination of these peasants. My dear lady, you must compose yourself; this—er—maniac presents an unsupported tale, an incredible story. It has shocked you horribly; it has shocked me; but we must wipe it from our memories."

Her heaving bosom and passionate eyes were eloquent of distrust.

"You will marry Joan?"

"What I have just heard has not changed my opinion of Joan. I swear it solemnly. Will you let me advise you?" he continued rapidly, pressing his advantage. "Sit down. Can I fetch you salts, a glass of wine? No. Pray be calm! That's better. You'll admit that none has a better right to give advice than I. You are not—er—equipped to face this horror alone. You are so young."

A catch in his voice nearly betrayed him. Damaris gasped. He took her hand and pressed it. Then, releasing the slim fingers, he said firmly—

“Let us concede for a moment that this woman has spoken the truth. What then? Would it not be folly, a gross blunder, to confront the guilty parties with the testimony of an outcast? We should put *them* on their guard, *ourselves* in a false position before the world. They would deny everything. If they are guilty, we must obtain more proof before we can act. Now, look at the other side! If innocent, what should we gain by sharing this shocking story with them? Should we not forfeit, or at least imperil, love, respect, and trust? Be guided by my experience. Wait!”

“You do not love Joan,” said Damaris.

“You have no right to make such a violent assumption.”

“Perhaps not, but that explains everything. You are very kind, very sympathetic, you mean well, but— Oh, Heaven! Only half an hour ago I told you that I was happy! Yes, I will wait. I will pretend. Pretence does not come easy to me. I—I’ve staked my all upon a man’s fidelity, and the issue means life or death. You cannot understand. You—you are a man.”

* * * * *

Casanegra deemed it his duty to warn Chillingworth that his life was in danger at the hand of Norah, and gave the hero an expurgated version of what had occurred in the *patio*.

"I can take care of myself," said the lawyer, "but I'm most annoyed that my wife should have been frightened. It was lucky, prince, that you were present."

Casanebra smiled ironically. "Yes," he replied, "it was very fortunate."

"I don't like foreigners," reflected Chillingworth. "These Italians are crooked. D—n him! I threw dust in his black eyes this morning, but he looks at me very queerly."

He had spent a busy afternoon, and had closed out several excellent sales. Fortified by success, he resolved to turn the key of that dark closet wherein gibbered a skeleton; the past should be redeemed by the future; now that he knew his weakness he could guard against it; a strong man used his mistakes as stepping-stones to higher things; he did not ascribe any importance to poetry, but that line of Tennyson's was to be commended. Thus musing, the Man of Destiny almost persuaded himself that he and Joan had been victims to circumstance, associates, so to speak, in a psychological experiment, explorers belated by conditions over which they had no control.

This philosophic attitude becomes the male, to the female it is unachievable. Joan was conscious that a blush had betrayed her; she knew that it behoved her to be very careful; that a false step meant a cracked reputation. It was imperative, she decided, to warn Chillingworth. But how? Since the fateful ride his glance had not even encountered

hers ; they had not exchanged half a dozen phrases. This absurd caution was negatively incriminating. How like a man to over-act his part ! The beauty had no suspicion of the truth—that repulsion, not caution, turned aside his eyes. She gave him credit for feelings as ardent as her own. She anticipated, with keen pleasure, a renewal of their relations. She had nothing to regret, except that unfortunate blush. In her code the unpardonable sin was the sin that is only black in print ! The decalogue has no terrors for a *décadent*, but a headline in a great newspaper is a scourge of scorpions. In the early '80's the word "degeneration" was not in the public mouth. Max Nordau's book was not written, but Joan and her brother were *décadents*. They acknowledged no divine law but the law of impulse ; from childhood they had done as they pleased. The sense of duty was not. In its place bloomed that green carnation amongst apothegms, "Let Heaven witness our acts, and Heaven alone !"

As she trolled with indifferent success for *bonitos*, her thoughts strayed wantonly towards Chillingworth, towards Napoleon, who could grasp opportunity. As the daughter of a millionaire and the wife of a prince, she could push his fortunes. She would interpret for him the meaning of the word "friendship." It was a thousand pities he had married that doll. How could she, with her petty prejudices, keep step with his vaulting ambitions ?

At four the party returned to the *adobe*, and Joan asked if Chillingworth was still at the office.

Casanegra answered in the affirmative, adding that he had seen him, and that stress of business would keep him at his desk till dinner-time. He spoke so courteously that the girl flattered herself into believing that her blush had been inward rather than outward. Norah's visit was mentioned, and her threats, to which none paid attention. At tea—Damaris was present—the talk turned upon knight-errantry. Mrs. Corny had accused Fabian of impoliteness because he had laughingly refused to bait her hook. This led to a general impeachment of Anglo-Saxon youths. The wise woman was very severe.

"Money, not manners, makes the man," said the dame. She blamed her own sex for prostrating themselves before golden calves.

"Gold is the unit of value," said Reggie.

"Brains," said Casanegra, who took Mrs. Corny seriously.

Damaris told them that the sons of Vallejo dared not smoke without permission in the father's presence.

"That sort of thing has passed away for ever," said Reggie, "but I'll back an Anglo-Saxon against all the world if a woman is in real trouble. Come, I'll leave it to Casanegra. He's a foreigner, but was four years at Oxford. I don't think he loves Englishmen, but he'll say what he thinks. Now, then, if a woman were in a scrape, if she wanted to bolt, if she didn't know where to go or whom to go with, wouldn't she be safer with the average

graduate of Oxford or Harvard than with the average Frenchman, Spaniard, or Italian?"

"In my opinion," said the Roman, deliberately, "she would."

To Damaris this speech of Fabian's seemed inspired. It solved the problem that was perplexing her; it proved the "open sesame" to the future. Casanegra, watching her face as she sipped her tea, was surprised at the little woman's self-possession. She smiled, laughed, took part in the talk, as if she were the happiest wife in California. The prince decided that his advice had been taken, that he had nothing to fear from a girl's inexperience and impetuosity. If he could have peered beneath the surface, he might have modified these conclusions. The smiles and chatter were the blossoms of a baleful plant, a hybrid growth of hate and jealousy, whose roots absorbed and destroyed all sweetness and mercy. Of her husband's guilt she was assured. Intuition and reason combined to condemn him. But she had promised to wait. For what? For superfluous evidence? No. To save a scandal? Certainly not. Why should she consider others? Delay was expedient, because the plans for an adequate revenge could not be matured without time and thought. If the blood of the Arrillagas counselled action, the Fabian strain, as indeed the name itself implied, bespoke procrastination. Alone, in her room, she had weighed Casanegra's words, and registered their value, as *nil*. His white lips

had given them the lie. Conviction had smote him as it smote her, but pride and policy constrained deception. She resented his double-dealing, although sensible of his sympathy and compassion.

Pacing up and down what she now regarded as a loathsome cage, Damaris determined upon flight, the first and last instinct of wounded animals. She devised, however, no inglorious retreat. She had not studied her husband's character in vain; she knew his strength and his weakness; he could be mortally wounded in two vital spots, pride and ambition. The partnership papers of Fabian and Chillingworth were not yet signed. If Dennis Fabian withdrew his support from the lawyer, the foundations of that famous castle in the air would crumble and vanish. Chillingworth had told his wife that their future lay in the hollow of the great man's hand.

To Fabian, therefore, she must address herself. He had loved the mother with infatuation; surely he would help the daughter. As the price of silence she would demand the withdrawal of his patronage from a man who prized it beyond all earthly blessings. Curiously enough, her attitude towards Joan was passive. Casanegra, she felt assured, would never make the girl a Roman princess; that was her punishment. Moreover, she laid the greater blame upon Chillingworth. It was unthinkable that a delicately nurtured, refined maiden would lead astray a man. Joan was full of life, coquettish

—yes, frankly outspoken, unconventional—but not a wanton.

It will be seen that the fixed idea of this unhappy wife was the ruin of her husband. To this end she bent all her energies, but the means baffled imagination. How could she reach Dennis Fabian? When she met the others at tea this question was not satisfactorily answered. San Lorenzo was remote from a railroad; alone and unaided flight seemed impossible.

But Reginald's careless words lent her wings. Why had she not thought of him before? Here was a *preux chevalier* willing and eager to manifest his fealty! With him all obstacles could be surmounted. She looked into his handsome face, believed that Heaven had sent him to the rescue, and decided to speak to him at the first favourable opportunity.

When Chillingworth returned she was dressing, putting the last touches to her toilet, conscious, as she glanced at her reflection in the mirror, that this seething inward excitement had stained her lips and cheeks and lent a brilliant lustre to her eyes.

“My dearest,” he began, “I'm so distressed at what happened this afternoon. Was my poor little woman frightened?”

He kissed her cheek and patted a white shoulder.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed, “you look wonderfully well.”

She advised him to dress, but he lingered at her side, admiring the curls that fluttered round her

neck. When he kissed her she could have struck him.

"You love me very much, don't you?" she said lightly.

"Yes," he answered, in the emphatic tones she had once esteemed. "I love you with all my heart and soul."

Her fingers trembled as she pinned a rose into the bodice of her gown.

"Norah," he said inconsequently, "is mad, poor wretch! Why does she want to kill me?"

"She holds you responsible, I suppose, for all this terrible bloodshed. I'll run away and leave you to dress."

"Stay and talk. I haven't said three words to you since the fire; and I've a piece of news for you. Stay!"

But she refused with a laugh, and left him. From the window she could see Reginald alone in the *patio*, which was illuminated with Chinese lanterns. These swayed gently to and fro, rocked by the breeze. Beyond the smooth lawn lay the shimmering, star-lit surface of the Pacific; the moon, in full-orbed glory, would not rise before midnight. Damaris snatched up a *rebozo* as she passed through the *sala*, and glided towards the young man. Twenty-two years before Dolores Arrillaga, inspired by a similar motive, tortured by hate and jealousy, but wearing a mask of smiles, a wife dishonoured by a faithless, treacherous husband—that husband also a *Gringo* and a lawyer—for whom she had sacrificed

kindred, fortune, and religion, young, ignorant of the world, the prey and plaything of inherited passions, had fled to the arms and implored the protection of Dennis Fabian !

“ You startled me,” said Reginald, as she laid her hand upon his sleeve.

“ Can I trust you ? ” she demanded. “ Will you do as I ask you without comment or question ? Do you wish to earn my eternal gratitude ? ”

“ I’m your slave,” he replied fervently. “ Try me.”

In a few simple phrases she preferred her request. Would he perfect all arrangements to take her on the morrow straight to San Francisco ? That was all. None must be apprised of their flight. The young man smiled as he promised hearty co-operation. Then the gong summoned them to the *sala*. As he followed her through the heavy mahogany doors, out of the dewy darkness into the warmth and light, he murmured a well-proven maxim, “ Tout vient à point à qui sait attendre ! ”

During dinner Chillingworth laughed and jested with Mrs. Corny ; the pair unaided sustained the burden of conversation. He told one story, and the dame instantly capped it. Damaris found herself frowning. The Man of Destiny strutting upon the brink of disaster was surely a spectacle for gods and mortals. Would he laugh on the morrow ? Her flight with Reginald would admit but one explanation. How would he confront the world where he had posed so successfully as Fortune’s

favourite? She wished he would stop laughing. The sense of contrast made her head ache. Finally, she said irritably—

"Why do you laugh so much?"

For her life's sake she could not have held back the question.

"He has sold a lot of land," said Casanegra, in his sarcastic tones.

He, too, was out of tune with mirth.

"I've reason to laugh," replied Chillingworth. "To-night's mail brought me a document I consider worth to me a million."

He kept his eyes upon his wife's face, and noted that she paled and put her hand to her lips.

"That was my piece of news," he said cheerily. "You wouldn't listen to it. Now I'm going to ask all of you to drink to the health and prosperity of a new firm—Fabian and Chillingworth."

A chorus of congratulation drowned the rest of the sentence. When the noise subsided, he added triumphantly—

"The articles of partnership are signed."

Later, when coffee was being served in the *sala*, he sat beside Damaris and spoke hopefully of the future, but she answered in monosyllables. Presently Joan called to him—

"Mr. Chillingworth, come here."

She was at the farthest end of the long room. No better opportunity for speaking a word in season would be likely to present itself; she could say what she pleased, none could overhear. In her

green eyes sparkled audacity, upon her red lips lay a mocking smile, upon her white bosom fluttered expectancy.

"Miss Fabian calls you," said Damaris.

"I would sooner sit by you, my darling."

She caught his glance and held it. Chillingworth looked deep into those luminous orbs, and forgot the articles of partnership and Joan waiting impatiently behind the piano.

"What are you thinking of?" he said fondly.

"I was wondering," she replied, lightly and pleasantly, "why blue eyes reflect honour and honesty. One cannot think of Judas with blue eyes."

The thrust sped home. She saw his lower lip quiver as he rose, and her heart hardened.

"He is guilty," she thought, "and dares to call me his darling."

She sought her own room at an early hour. She was not sleepy nor tired, for the arch-inquisitor gives his victims amazing strength and endurance, but she wished to be alone. So when the party settled down as usual to cards, she bade them good night, and smilingly begged Chillingworth not to wake her when he came to bed. He accompanied his wife to the door of the *sala* and kissed her—a kiss that made her shiver. She accepted the caress without returning it, entered her room, lit a lamp, and sat down to a desk. Then she unlocked a drawer and took therefrom a diary. It was a simple record of her married life. The entries were few in

number, but fragrant of love and loyalty, tender phrases, with blanks here and there sweetly suggestive of thoughts that may not be fettered to words. Damaris read the diary from beginning to end. Then she dipped a pen into ink and wrote—

"The fond fool who scribbled in this book died suddenly upon the last day of October, 1881."

She returned the book to the drawer and walked to the open window. As she stood there, gazing wistfully across the waters of the bay, a rustling sound, as if from the adjoining room, fell upon her ear. This chamber—a peculiar feature in all Spanish houses—was used by Chillingworth as a dressing-room. It had no door save the one that led into the large apartment where Damaris was standing, and its window was small, high up in the thick wall, and heavily barred. In the days of the del Pliegos this had been the sanctuary, so to speak, of the daughters of the house. The large room, communicating with the *sala*, had been occupied for more than a century by the head of the family and his wife. At night the door between the two rooms would be locked, and none could disturb the slumbers of the virgins without arousing the chief, beneath whose pillow lay the big iron key.

Damaris listened for the repetition of the sound, but the silence was unbroken. She wondered idly if a skunk had entered the *adobe*. In Southern California windows and doors are opened at night and remain closed during the day; flies, not burglars, are the bugbears of housewives. A skunk soon

advertises his presence; and Damaris, noting no odour save the fragrance of the Castilian roses, decided that a bat or a mouse must have caused the rustling. Lamp in hand, she peered into the barely furnished dressing-room. Below the window stood a bureau; upon the walls were pegs, from which hung Chillingworth's coats; and in the corner was an old-fashioned mahogany cupboard, black with age and worm-eaten. There was no bed, no curtains, and no carpet save a strip of matting laid down to protect Chillingworth's feet. Seeing no signs of bat, mouse, or skunk, Damaris returned to the window and curled herself up on the window-seat, unconsciously assuming the pose of a lonely child. Her face expressed infinite dejection; all colour had faded from the white skin, eyelids and lips drooped in piteous curves, and her hands lay limp in her lap. What could she do? Her plans, she reflected, were as dust upon the wheels of a gigantic locomotive, and as powerless to arrest its progress. No action upon her part could take from this colossus his million secured to him by law, whose expert minister he was; and if she left him, her flight would merely smooth his path to the divorce courts. Free, he would marry Joan. What could she do?

Out of the *sala* windows floated the chaff and chatter of the card-party. She could easily distinguish the voices—Mrs. Corny's staccato notes; Reginald's cultured, well-poised phrases; Joan's clear, flute-like tones; her husband's mellow laugh,

so full of mirth and cheer; and, lastly, Casanegra's thin, carefully enunciated periods. Thinking of the Roman, his face formed itself in the luminous darkness of the *patio*. She could see, as plainly as if the prince stood before her, his aquiline nose with its melancholy droop, his sombre eyes, the delicately modelled chin and lips. Poor fellow! Poor pallid prince, who would fain, as he had often said, exchange his titles and palaces for the stout limbs of some *contadino*! Truly the laurels of life bloomed only for the strong; for the weak was a wreath of thorns. Alas! he and she were children of the past. Not for them was the future, but for others; for this mighty northern race, sublime in its egoism, sweeping on and on to the uttermost parts of the earth, for ever removing its neighbour's landmark, exterminating all who dared dispute its sovereign sway, irresistible, insatiable!

And the realization of this stirred to agony every fibre of heart, soul, and body.

"O God!" she prayed in mad, impotent revolt. "How long, O Lord! dost Thou not avenge our blood on these that dwell on the earth?"

But out of the darkness came no answer.

• • • • •

Later, she undressed and lay down. When Chillingworth came in, she closed her aching eyes and pretended to sleep. Mindful of what she had said, he was careful not to disturb her. In less than half an hour she could tell by his measured breathing that he was slumbering peacefully at her side.

Presently the moon rose, flooding the big room with mystic light, and upon the white plaster of the walls danced the shadows of the trees in the *patio*. She could recall a game taught to her when a child of six by the Rev. Abner, an enchanting game, styled by the parson the Shadow Minuet, danced by moonlight between wall and window. She could remember her wonder and amazement when she first discovered that she, a tiny girl, could play with shadows; and now, alas! shadows played with her.

Idly noting the delicate tracery of eucalyptus leaves, black in silhouette upon silver, she caught a faint sound, similar to the rustle she had heard before. Glancing at the door of the dressing-room, she saw it swing slowly upon its hinges, so slowly and so silently that it seemed to move obedient to the touch of fairy fingers. And then, as Damaris gazed spellbound into the darkness of the inner chamber, a face revealed itself, the face of Norah O'Connor. Upon her lips, drawn back from white teeth, was the grin, and in her eyes the glare of a maniac! Noiselessly she advanced, till she stood, a silver statue of Nemesis, within ten feet of the bed!

Instantly there flashed into Damaris's mind the full significance of her presence. With a lunatic's cunning, Norah must have concealed herself in the ancient cupboard, entering the *adobe* during the dinner hour, when the front part of the house was deserted. And there she had waited, biding her time. And now the supreme moment had come. In a minute, nay, in a second, she would plunge the

knife that glittered in her hand into the heart of her enemy.

God had answered the prayer of Damaris! In the hour of triumph, in the plenitude of his powers, the strong man was destined to be stricken, to be blotted out; to be flung, a collapsed bladder, to the winds of eternity. Ah, yes, God was just!

Beneath the shadow of long lashes her eyes rested upon that motionless figure standing grim and stark in the blaze of the moonlight. For what was Norah waiting? Why did she not strike? Her attitude, with head inclined and half-opened mouth, betokened acute attention, as if she were listening, every sense strained, for some subtle, elusive sound.

Damaris watched her in agony of anticipation. Norah, the instrument of Divine wrath, was awaiting, of course, God's command. Borne upon the breeze the word would surely come—strike!

And presently the signal came. From the mouth of the victim fluttered a name—

"Damaris."


It was whispered so softly, so tenderly, in such yearning accents, that the mere enunciation of it implied at once confession, a plea for pardon and absolution. But in Norah's ears the sweet whisper clashed like the cymbals of the furies. Her unblinking eyes slowly turned and fixed themselves in a baneful stare upon the broad breast of Chillingworth, the muscles beneath her rags began to harden and dilate; then, swiftly and surely as a rattlesnake, she darted forward. The knife was

raised, and fell sheathed to the hilt in flesh, not the flesh of the guilty, but of the innocent, for across the body of her husband the wife had flung a shield—herself!

And across the pale waters was wafted a sigh from the throne of the Eternal: "Hate dies, but love is immortal!"

CHAPTER X.

THE DAUGHTERS OF THEMIS.

 HILLINGWORTH followed the doctor into the *patio*, and asked for the truth. The sun was rising in the east, as they walked in silence past the fountain, and in the air was the chill of dawn. Lowly, who had domestic troubles of his own, moved wearily. For many hours he had wrestled with death, and the struggle had taxed a man who was neither young nor strong. He inhaled the fresh sea-breeze, and noted the cobwebs upon the cypress fence that bordered the lawn. Each web was dew-laden and sparkling with a thousand prismatic colours, yet each signified destruction of life.

“You can give me some hope?” said Chillingworth, eagerly.

“She is alive,” replied the doctor, gently. “But it would be cruel to deceive you. The injury is so severe that in my opinion nothing short of a miracle can save her. The knife penetrated the peritoneal cavity between the eleventh and twelfth ribs. She had lost a great deal of blood, and, as you know,

she had none to spare. Mr. Chillingworth, you must face the inevitable."

"When will——"

"I cannot tell yet. I apprehend peritonitis, if she doesn't collapse from shock. Quiet, absolute quiet, is all I can prescribe for the present. I shall return in a few hours."

When he had gone Chillingworth returned to the room where his wife lay. At the bedside sat Mrs. Fish; in the *sala* were the others. No change was perceptible in Damaris. The breath just flickered between her lips, as if it were loth to leave her pure white body; the long lashes lay black upon her cheeks. Mrs. Fish lifted a warning finger, and then pointed to the door. Chillingworth picked up a small object lying upon the desk, and stole from the room. Mrs. Corny begged to be told the doctor's decision.

"He anticipates the worst," said the lawyer, in frozen tones. "I think it is my duty to inform you that my wife is the daughter of Dolores Arrillaga and Otho Fabian. Perhaps Mr. Fabian should be sent for. I leave that to your discretion"—he looked at Mrs. Corny, who was staring at his white face—"you can do as you please."

Then he held up the emerald ring. He had found it tied to the knife. In a few sentences he told his listeners the history of the gem—how it had come into his possession; how he had lost it.

"If proof is needed to satisfy Mr. Fabian this will suffice."

He handed the intaglio to Mrs. Corny, who received it with a shudder. Casanegra approached the group.

"If you will spare me five minutes," he said to Chillingworth, "I should like to speak to you in private."

They walked down the path that led to the sea. Chillingworth strode along feeling that his heart had turned to stone; the prince followed, nervously tugging his moustache.

"Well," said the lawyer, coming to a sudden halt at the edge of the sand, "what is it?"

"Your wife," began Casanegra, "is prescribed perfect quiet. Yes. Her life hangs upon a thread so fine that the least disturbance might snap it. Be patient. I deem it my duty to tell you that your presence at her bedside is likely to—to disturb her. Let me finish. I told you that Norah O'Connor had threatened your life; that she made these threats to your wife in my hearing. But I did not tell you all that she said. It seems that she and this man who was hanged were witnesses of what passed between you and Joan Fabian after the fire. They had concealed themselves near the spring you call the Fairy's Well."

As he spoke he marked Chillingworth's eyes burning in their hollow sockets. He continued—

"I told your wife, who was prostrated with shock, that the woman was mad and lying, but I was satisfied in my own mind that her shameful story was true. Pray don't interrupt me! And in spite

of my efforts to persuade Mrs. Chillingworth to the contrary, I saw that she too believed it. Later, at tea, I modified this opinion; your wife's extraordinary self-control deceived me. Now I hold to my first impression. You will agree with me that, whether you are guilty or not, it would be unwise to take the chance of distressing her by your presence. Mrs. Fish can say that you are forbidden the room by the doctor."

"What are you going to do?"

"That, sir, is my affair."

"I—I thank you," stammered Chillingworth. "You have done me a service. As for Norah O'Connor, I call your attention to the fact that she is crazy. She has been caught, and at this moment is strapped to a bed. Such persons are entirely irresponsible. I don't know what she said, but if her story inculpates Miss Fabian, I denounce it as a lie."

"No gentleman," said Casanegra, quietly, "could say more—or less."

He turned his back upon Chillingworth and strolled back to the *adobe*. The lawyer paced up and down the sands abjectly miserable. He was no Latin scholar or Seneca's famous line might have occurred to him: "Prima et maxima peccantium poena est peccare."

The thought that he was not worthy to sit beside his faithful little woman, that he, the man who loved her, must be absent during those last bitter hours, that she must drift into the wastes beyond the

grave believing that he had been false to her, that it was too late now to speak—these things crushed him utterly. And how could he bear her loss? Truly had Mrs. Corny said that if he gained half the earth and lost her love his riches would profit him nothing.

Presently Joan came to him, gliding across the sands with that easy graceful motion he had often admired.

“I am so sorry, so grieved,” she whispered.

He looked at her coldly, almost brutally, knowing that she lied. She was not sorry, this witch. In her treacherous eyes he could see stirring a horrid hope, an unholy triumph. And her love for him seemed the foulest thing under God’s skies.

“I wish that I could comfort you,” she said, putting out her hand. “Why do you shrink from me?”

“You ask why?” he replied bitterly.

“Yes—why? Have you forgotten——?”

“Forgotten! Good God!”

He curbed himself with effort. Joan’s expression suddenly changed; there was no mistaking this man’s meaning.

“You hate me,” she said, with a little shiver.

He did not answer.

“I suspected something last night, when you sat beside me so cold and sullen. But I thought you were trying to play a part.”

She looked furtively at his impassive features. Then she threw aside the rags of constraint and spoke out.

"Is my love worth nothing? Do you know, do you realize, what I can do for you, what I will do for you? Your wife is no mate for William Chillingworth. Now, listen," she went on fluently, as if the words had been rehearsed. "I love you so well, that I will send away Casanegra. I will be faithful—do you hear me? I will wait for years if need be. See how I humble myself. Love——"

"Stop," he said sternly. "The word love upon our lips is a mockery. You say my wife is no mate for me. I, by Heaven! am no mate for her. Last night she saved my worthless life knowing that I was false to her; sacrificed herself—for me. That was love—the love of an angel. And that love I have justly forfeited. Joan Fabian, you and I must part here, and for ever. You will do well not to marry Casanegra. I warn you that he not only suspects, but is in full possession of the facts. You were seen by Norah in my arms!"

She gasped out the word, "Seen, seen!" as if it would choke her.

"I don't care," she cried, clutching at straws; "I love you and you love me!"

"I would have spared you if I could," he replied, flushing deeply. "You—you force me to say a brutal thing. I do not love you. What is best in me belongs to my wife. If she dies she will take my heart with her. What will be left would not be worth the acceptance."

Then she turned from him and departed.



Throughout that terrible day there was no change in the condition of Damaris.

"Why do you not sit with her?" said Mrs. Corny to Chillingworth.

"I am not worthy," he said hoarsely; "but if she asks for me I will go to her."

The wise woman understood, and grasped his hand. That same evening, after an interview with the prince, she sent a telegram to Fabian. He was busy in Northern California, but he travelled to the San Julian as fast as a special train and relays of horses could bring him. As his private car rolled swiftly through the pleasant Salinas Valley, he wondered why the summons had been so urgent.

"The doctor," said Mrs. Corny, who received the lord of many acres in the *sala*, "has given me his positive assurance that Mrs. Chillingworth cannot live. She just breathes, that's all."

"A dreadful tragedy," murmured Fabian; "but it is better, my dear Letty—I say, humanly speaking, it is better that of the two the man should be spared. There is work for William Chillingworth to do."

Mrs. Corny looked at the egoist with a queer expression upon her face.

"Don't," she entreated, laying her hand on his sleeve.

He raised his eyebrows in surprise. "You—er—take this hardly, Letty. I—I cannot quite understand——"

He paused, for in his friend's eyes he read a grim message of pain and pity; then he said coldly—

"You have something to tell me. Don't beat about the bush. Tell it."

"Damaris Chillingworth," said Mrs. Corny, slowly, "is the daughter of Dolores Arrillaga. She was adopted by the Rev. Abner Fish, who, it appears, once offered the child to you."

As she spoke the florid tint faded from his ripe cheeks, and the lines upon each side of the mouth suddenly deepened.

"Go on," he said hoarsely.

She laid the emerald ring upon the palm of his hand.

"That," she said, and her voice quivered, "was tied to the handle of the knife."

"It's an accursed thing," said Fabian.

He glanced at it irresolutely; then he rose to his feet, crossed the room, and dropped the intaglio into the heart of the fire.

"An accursed thing," he repeated, "which has wrought mischief. I—I am not superstitious, Letty"—he moistened his dry lips with his tongue. "I was told when I bought that ring in Egypt long ago that these gems are accredited with occult powers. I thought then, and I think still, that such a belief is absurd—rank nonsense. But if it had not been for that ring and the memories connected with it, I should not have sent away the child."

It was evident that the mere sight of the emerald had distressed Fabian immeasurably. Oblivious of the present, he had turned back the pages of the

book of life, and was reading therein the story of Dolores. Mrs. Corny waited patiently.

"I took her to Cairo," he murmured, as if unconscious of the dame's presence. "None knew of that visit. And I tried to win her love. My God! how I loved that woman! But she never cared for me. Hatred of the brute who beat her drove her to me, but I couldn't touch her heart. I bought that ring because it was like her. She used to wear it. Then she met Otho in New York, and he followed us to California. She liked him—all women liked him; and I trusted him, fool that I was! Then the child was born. I thought that would draw us together."

"What!" ejaculated Mrs. Corny. "Is Damaris your child?"

His face was so ghastly, laden with such sadness, such leaden greyness, that she turned aside her pitiful eyes.

"Yes, she is mine. Let me finish, Letty. There is not much more to tell. The child came between me and Dolores. I began to hate it. I was a miserable man in those days. My own house was a house of horrors. I saw my wife fading away, but I could not tear myself loose from Dolores. I was half mad. Well, one day the climax came. I found her playing with the baby, kissing and hugging it, as women do; and the sight of this love, denied to me, drove me crazy. There was a scene, and I—I struck her. She had a wild Spanish temper, and she taunted me beyond endurance. I

struck her, not heavily, but she staggered and fell to the ground. Just then Otho entered the room. He had a malacca cane in his hand; I had nothing. He attacked me fiercely, and half killed me. Dolores urged him passionately not to spare me. Then she pulled the ring from her finger and flung it in my face—you can still see the scar on my forehead. ‘Do you think,’ said I, ‘that I want anything to remind me of you? Give it to your lover.’ I turned to go, but I saw Otho pick up the ring and place it on his finger. ‘I’ll wear it as long as I live,’ I heard him say. They went to San José that night. There Dolores died, and soon after Otho followed her. On his death-bed he sent me his cane and the ring.”

“Cruel, cruel!” sighed Mrs. Corny.

“I refused the legacies,” said Fabian, slowly; “but if—if the child had come alone, I would not have denied her shelter.”

Then he startled Mrs. Corny by the intensity of his next question.

“Why was the ring tied to the knife?”

She recited the facts in the order she had received them from Chillingworth.

“Curious,” muttered Fabian. “One would almost believe that—— Well, the thing is destroyed. So this is why you sent for me?”

“There is more,” said Mrs. Corny, constrainedly. “Casanegra has gone.”

“Gone!” He repeated the word angrily, drumming upon the table beside him with his

long nervous fingers. "What the devil do you mean?"

"He has broken his engagement. He came to me and gave reasons. In my opinion"—she spoke deliberately—"he could not as a man of honour marry Joan."

"What has she done?" thundered Fabian.

"Remember," said Mrs. Corny, coldly, "that she is your daughter, with—with your blood in her veins, and make—make allowance for that. I don't know what she has done, but she admits that Casanegra is justified in leaving her. She is prostrated. You will hardly recognize her. She knows that she is partly to blame for this tragedy."

As delicately as possible she gave the father the prince's reasons. Fabian listened, covering a haggard face with his hands.

"You must be prepared for this getting into the newspapers. Norah has been caught; she is hopelessly mad, and she raves of this. Of course the story will spread. The exact truth can never be known, but Joan has compromised herself very gravely."

"Where is Reginald?"

"You can see him. Shall I send him to you?"

He nodded limply; the suavity was out of him, and the starch. He looked bedraggled, like a strong man smitten suddenly by some leprous affliction. When the door closed behind Mrs. Corny's plump figure he trembled, and his fingers clutched the air as if he were grasping blindly in search of his

lost self-control. Now and again he muttered the name of the woman he had loved—"Dolores, Dolores!" and he walked to the fireplace and peered into the glowing cinders. Where he had thrown the emerald lay a ring of molten gold; the gem had resolved itself into other elements. And with it had melted his hate. Presently his son entered, and the two men, so like in face and bearing, met in the centre of the room, staring fixedly into each other's faces and speaking not a word. The young fellow was as haggard as his father. They did not shake hands.

"Well, sir," broke sharply from the elder, "why did you not protect your sister? Where were your eyes?"

"They were looking at some one else," he retorted sullenly.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I am your son," replied Reginald, bitterly, "cursed with your passions and your tastes. What appealed to you appeals to me. You loved the mother, I love the daughter; they, too, were made in the same mould. Damaris Chillingworth is the living image of Dolores Arrillaga."

The father quailed before this outburst.

"I knew what was going on," continued the son, "and I thought that Joan could take care of herself. If this cursed mad woman had not interfered, Damaris and I would have been halfway to New York to-day."

"You know," sneered Fabian, "that she is the

daughter of Dolores Arrillaga. You don't know that I'm her father. Damaris is your half-sister."

The young man recoiled.

"Your half-sister," repeated Fabian, slowly.

His mind, trained to interpret the thoughts of other men, apprehended the motive that had inspired Reginald. Behind words and acts was that ego-mania which defies duty, ties of kindred, all obligations, human and divine, which runs amôk—a raging pestilence!

"You considered no one but yourself," continued the father.

"I am your son," said Reginald, for the second time.

"I disown you, sir."

"My own personality is as hateful to me as to you," retorted Reginald, fiercely. "My half-sister! Oh, God!"

He flung himself face downward upon the couch where he had sat so often beside Damaris. Fabian watched him with softening eyes. He heard a cry of despair, the frantic groans of the self-worshipper when the idol is cast down and shattered. Remorse once had gnawed his heart when he stood beside his wife's grave, yet the scars had healed; the idol, too, had been repaired and set up. He touched his son's shoulder.

The young man raised his face from the cushions, and, looking up, noted the pinched nostrils and the deep lines upon each side of his father's mouth. It vaguely occurred to him that this cool, calm,

masterful being, whose authority none disputed, was growing old. His clothes hung loosely upon a spare figure; the hair was very white; there were bags beneath the keen grey eyes.

"For some years," said Fabian, slowly, "we have not been friends. You have condemned me for— Well, we need not go into details. And—and I've made no special effort to adjust our relations. Our paths pointed north and south. Business claimed me, pleasure you. Both are autocrats. None the less, we are father and son."

He repeated the words softly, "Father and son."

Reginald, thinking of Damaris, and hardly conscious that his father was speaking, caught the last words, and perceived at the same time that Fabian was strangely moved. The millionaire had lost his prim self-command and gained instead—what? Surely those hard eyes were not moist with tears! The son listened more attentively.

"When you were a boy," continued Fabian, "I let you have your own way because I was convinced that experience—plenty of it—lays golden eggs. If you cried for cayenne, I handed you the pepper-pot, and——"

"Laughed when I choked."

"Just so; you never fooled with cayenne a second time! We were speaking of experience. I hoped that you would collect your eggs, place them in one basket, and——"

"What was the use of my turning collector? Good Heavens! You have eggs enough."

"Ah!"—the father smiled grimly, in his chill official fashion. "You think I care for money?"

"Well, yes."

"I do not. I care for power—a very different thing."

The word in his ample mouth had a certain value—a full-throated, deep-chested emphasis. He continued—

"But the power we don't possess is the power we covet. I would gladly exchange my influence with—say, the California legislature, for that common sympathy that most fathers are entitled to command at the hands of their children."

He paused, and walked, his head bent, the length of the *sala*. When he turned at the end of the room irresolution perched uncomfortably upon his stern features.

"And yet," he said more firmly, "I admit frankly that I have forfeited my privileges. For twenty years I've faced the world alone. If I died to-day many persons would suffer, because philosophy has taught me that the public good is also the private good. To accomplish certain ends I have helped others—largely. These—er—parasites would doubtless lament my loss; but I fear that my death would not affect you, nor Joan, nor the poor child who lies in that room yonder."

He looked at Reginald, hoping possibly that the son would repudiate his words. Reginald said nothing.

"I see that I've not exaggerated. Yes; I've known of this for some time, and the knowledge has not affected me. But to-day I am conscious of a change. I can pity you, my son; and I pity Joan. We three have suffered in common; we have loved, with a selfish, all-absorbing passion that defies law and reason, and we have seen our loves turn to ashes."

"Father, what can we do?"

He held out his hands with a gesture he had learned as a boy.

"You can take your sister away at once. This is no place for her, no place for you. Take her abroad, and—and be good to her. I shall stay here till the end."

The young man glanced at the door that divided him from the woman he loved. It would be bitter indeed leaving her to die without one word; and the care of his sister implied much that was disagreeable. A refusal quivered on his tongue's tip; then he met the light in the father's eyes, a beacon light of confidence and encouragement never seen there before, and this glow faintly warmed the death chill at his heart.

"I'll do what I can," he answered humbly. "It won't be much, you can swear, but it may be better than nothing."

* * * * *

Chillingworth passed the fourth day at his wife's bedside. The symptoms of peritonitis—a rapid pulse, fever, and intense pain—had manifested

themselves, and Lowly prescribed opiates, that robbed the patient of sight and hearing. Mrs. Corny prevailed upon Mrs. Fish to leave the sick-room. The widow of the Rev. Abner took her swollen, tear-stained face to Dennis Fabian, for this strangely assorted pair had spent already many hours together. The father of Damaris never tired of asking questions about his child; and curiosity—thanks to the widow's remarkable memory for trifles—was abundantly satisfied.

"I can't help recalling," she whimpered, "the many times I slapped her. I shall lie awake nights thinking of that."

Fabian winced; he had passed two sleepless nights, a prey to the myriad stings of conscience.

"I'll never get over it," sobbed Mrs. Fish—"never! When I heard them hammering at my door I knew that death was abroad. I dreamed of snow the very week before, and slush, and mud! But I couldn't have believed that the call was for her. Mercy me! I shall go crazy."

Fabian marked the dominant note of this *miserere*—selfishness; the prospect of her own sufferings was a burden not to be borne. He contrasted this widow of a minister with the gay Mrs. Corny, whom he had hitherto regarded somewhat contemptuously as a woman of fashion. He had seen the two working together, early and late, and comparisons were inevitable. Mrs. Corny amazed him by her tact, ability, serenity, and devotion. She attended to all the details—no competent nurse had yet

been secured—received the doctor's instructions, administered the medicines, never frowned at the stupidity of others, and managed the household. Poor Mrs. Fish sat huddled up, sodden with misery and helplessness. When she was not talking to Dennis Fabian, the tears rolled unrestrained down her plump cheeks; the fountain in the *patio* flowed not a whit faster nor freer.

Sitting at the desk he had given Damaris, Chillingworth opened the middle drawer and found in it a packet of envelopes tied up with white ribbon. One contained a lock of his hair; another some rare wild flowers he had picked for her near the Carmel Mission—she had taken pains to teach him the botanical names; he cursed himself because he had forgotten them. A third envelope was full of tiny shells; he could remember the sunlit cove where they had gathered them; the red sandstone rocks, the green translucent water, the fine white sands. Each souvenir was eloquent of time and place, an idyll in itself. Upon all these trifles lay the glamour of youth and love. Then he found her diary, and, reading it, the devotion of his little woman was made still more manifest. He lingered over the first pages, savouring their sweetness and simplicity, apprehending, too late, the full measure and meaning of the innocent, guileless phrases. For here was love's pleasaunce, where the nightingales trill their tuneful rhapsodies, where bloom the fairest flowers, where Spring holds her court for ever, where the tree of life soars skyward laden with the

golden apples of happiness. And Chillingworth, standing in that enchanted garden and knowing that it was holy ground, realized that by reason of his misdoing he must be driven forth into the wilderness beyond.

Here was writ a pretty extravagance—

“I pray that I may not live to see the day when my love turns cold. Truly life dies when love flies.”

He read on—

“To-day my dear husband and I talked of the future, and he unfolded for me his plans, a gay pattern too bright for my eyes. I was dazzled, but I dared not say so. My dearest has set his hopes upon so much—riches, power, and fame. With so much stirring in his mind, can there be room for me? I feel sometimes rather lonesome. I am a foolish, love-sick girl. I can think of nothing but of him.”

And again—

“He says that I fill his heart, but, alas! his head is full of business. He can talk now of nothing but the ranch. Already I am jealous of prosperity. And my mind is overburdened with misgiving.”

Upon the evening of the second auction was written this—

“Norah O'Connor spoke to the people, and produced a profound impression. Oh, the poor soul! What a wreck, what a wreck! Has God forsaken her? Her fierce words spoiled the sale; and Will is furious. Is he responsible for the blood that has been shed? I dare

not answer the question. The spirit of prophecy seemed strong in Norah. Blood must be wiped out with blood. Whose blood? O Heavenly Father, I pray Thee to spare my beloved husband!"

During her week of illness, when she was confined to the bed, there were no entries. Then these lines—

"I have been punished for my wickedness. The baby that I longed for has been taken from me. I fear that I love my husband with a greater love than God approves. I am scared at the intensity of my feelings, and of their complexity. I think of my poor mother. What a sad name Dolores is! Hate and jealousy are terrible scourges. My soul seems flayed. Thank God! my dear faithful Will spends all his spare hours with me, and I know that I am trying, fretful, and irritable. Few wives are loved with the devotion that has been given to me. My sweetheart can do nothing by halves. How tender and true he is! And I—wicked fool!—doubted him."

Then Chillingworth read the last entry, and put aside the book with anguish unspeakable. Glancing fearfully round, his eyes rested upon her face, the white face of a child, with the grey shadows of death stealing across its fair surface. And as he looked, he told himself that this sweet child's face would haunt him waking and sleeping for ever!

This man, who had been to himself the centre of the universe, who had prided himself upon his stature, his strength, his keen brains, now dwindled

to mean proportions. He slunk from the room calling himself Cain.

An hour later Damaris opened her eyes, and saw Mrs. Corny standing beside her, medicine bottle in hand.

"Don't give me my medicine yet," she faltered. "I—I want to see my—my husband."

"Dear Damaris, the doctor begged me not to neglect to——"

"I—I m—must see him," she gasped, "before this dreadful drowsiness returns. Fetch him, now—now!"

Mrs. Corny found Chillingworth walking with Fabian up and down the *patio*. There had been no explanations between the two men, none was necessary. A common interest drew them together, not business; by tacit consent material matters were laid upon the shelf.

"She wants you," said Mrs. Corny. "I think it is best to humour her. Go at once."

Chillingworth obeyed in silence, and knelt down by the bed. He had touched her forehead with his hot lips.

"Will," she said, very feebly, "tell me the truth. I am dying, am I not?"

He could not trust himself to answer, but he kissed and fondled the little hands, and his tears fell upon them.

"Yes," she murmured; "I am going away."

His face was pressed against the counterpane; her fingers strayed amongst his thick crisp curls.

"Do you care so very much?" she asked, as the magnetism of his agony—the more intense because suppressed—was transmitted to her. "Do you really care?"

"Care?" he repeated huskily. "My darling, I have murdered you. I have read your diary. Say that you forgive me!"

"I forgave you," she said dreamily, "as the knife fell. Oh, Will, I tried to cut you out of my heart, but I couldn't! I am not afraid of death; it is harder to think of living. God has been good to me. How many happy hours I have passed! I shall not be missed, but you—Will, there is so much for you to do. But—promise me—promise me, dear, that you will not be hard upon the weak. Shoulder some of their burdens. You are so strong. Yes, I'm willing to die."

He was too unmanned to speak, and she murmured with difficulty a few more sentences. He began to dimly understand that she took for granted that his love was no longer hers. Then, rallying his energies, he implored her to believe him. Through the open window came the sullen roar of the surf, a fitting accompaniment to his impassioned, despairing words.

"I shall go mad," he said, "if you leave me doubting my love. Oh, Damaris, you ask me to remember the weakness of others! Take pity, my darling, upon my weakness, and believe that that and not my strength betrayed me. What is best in me belongs to you, and it has always been so. My

love burns with as pure a flame as yours. Your dear blood has purged it of grossness. Believe that, Damaris, *or*—I say it in all solemnity—your sacrifice will have been in vain.”

A faint smile glowed upon her cheeks. “Why then have you kept away from me?”

“You were unconscious,” he stammered, “and—and I thought my presence would distress you. Surely you—you understand.”

“Yes,” she answered, “I understand now. Talk to me a little. I long to hear your voice. No, it won’t hurt me. Soon they will give me that horrible medicine, and I shall feel myself falling, falling, falling into nothingness. Talk, dear Will. Why is the house so very quiet?”

He told her that the party had broken up; that Joan and her brother and Casanegra were gone; that only Fabian and Mrs. Corny remained.

“Why is Mr. Fabian here?”

He did not dare to tell her the truth. “His heart yearns to you, Damaris. You are the daughter of the woman he loved. He regrets bitterly that he turned you from his roof.”

“I should like to see him,” she said feebly, “before—before I take the opiate.”

Chillingworth, eager to gratify her slightest wish, summoned Dennis Fabian. At last father and daughter gazed into each other’s eyes. The face of the man was set and stern, for his powers of self-command were taxed to the utmost; the face of Damaris was soft and tender. Upon each lay the

racial characteristics of Latin and Anglo-Saxon. Fabian's proud carriage and fine bodily presence emphasized cruelly the helpless attitude of the pain-stricken, pallid girl. Yet, as the two faces came together and met in a kiss, these specific differences were blotted out as if they were not.

"You are my kinsman," said Damaris.

Fabian winced; this was the voice of Dolores. "Yes," he answered unsteadily, sensible that the burden of many years had been miraculously lifted at the sound of these soft, thrilling tones—"yes, my child; I am your kinsman."

"You have a kind face," she said slowly.

He flushed. A kind face? His? When had he spared either man or woman? His mirror had told him that his features indicated pride, ambition, power, energy, self-dependence, but not kindness. Chillingworth, watching him intently, and knowing what was passing in that critical mind, told himself that the adjective was not ill-chosen—the face, indeed, was transfigured.

"I want to ask you," said Damaris, speaking with difficulty, "to keep an eye upon the poor Irish who were turned away from the San Julian. This is such a lovely place. And I feel that it is hard to leave it—very hard. That is why I am so sorry for them."

"I will promise to do as you ask," said her father, hurriedly. "Rest easy, Damaris; they shall be considered. My dear"—his voice trembled—"I wish I could do more for you—much more; my debt to

you has been compounding for twenty years. When you get strong and well, I shall try and pay it in full. You understand, in full. I—I have room for you in my heart.”

She smiled. “I shall not get strong and well. If—if you feel that you owe me anything, pay it to those like me, the feeble who are so easily driven to the wall.”

She smiled again and closed her eyes. The men watched her in silence; she had fallen asleep.

In five minutes Mrs. Corny stole in, medicine bottle in hand, determined to enforce the full rigour of the dose, but stayed her intentions when she saw the patient was sleeping. Fabian and Chillingworth retreated to the *patio*.

“When she wakes,” said Mrs. Corny to the husband, who was loth to go, “I’ll call you.”

The two men began to walk up and down the fragrant garden. Chillingworth pointed out the corner of the dusty high-road where Damaris was wont to await his return, a smile upon her face.

“And I,” he said bitterly, “would be thinking of the future, plotting and planning to make money. Good heavens! what fools men are! I owned a mine of purest gold, and never knew the value of it. And now the substance has turned to shadow. She is drifting away from us, fading hour by hour! Just now, when her eyes closed, I thought she was gone; so did you. And when the blow falls, what shall I do? What shall I do?”

"It is well to ask the question," replied Fabian, mechanically, "and to answer it."

"I cannot stay here. I must leave California. Could I stand the sight of that? It would drive me mad!"

He indicated, with a sweep of his hand, the glowing landscape upon which streamed the rays of the sinking sun. It was November—that dreary month in other lands, grim and grey there, but here all glorious, apparelled like a king's daughter in cloth of gold.

"Where will you go?" said Fabian.

"Ah, where?"—he laughed bitterly. "Is there a land of oblivion?"

"There is work," said Fabian, doggedly. "If you leave California you will sacrifice too much. You must stay here."

"But you cannot count upon me, Mr. Fabian, to carry out the plans we outlined."

Fabian coughed and stammered out—"Our plans, I admit, need modification, perhaps reconstruction. But I venture to hope that you will not leave me to work them out alone. My children will probably live in Europe. Reginald has neither taste nor capacity for business. Don't talk of going, my boy. It's your duty to stay. Duty!"—he smiled sarcastically. "The word has an odd smack in my mouth."

They talked on, drifting nearer together as men will when they stand side by side in the shadows, linked to each other by sorrow and remorse. There was no bloodless moralizing; but the unspoken

consciousness that beneath the suffering, the sin, and the shame lay purpose and meaning—inexorable law not lightly to be apprehended, yet not to be ignored. Prosperity had sown tares in the heart of Chillingworth; in the darkness of adversity these withered and were consumed. The divine spark burns brightest in the gloom. The young lawyer, in blind arrogance and egoism, had once challenged the judgment of that court whose sentences are never reversed; he knew now that his case was weak, and awaited the irrevocable decree trembling.

Presently the doctor drove up, and Fabian accompanied him into the *adobe*. Chillingworth still paced on, watching the glorious sunlight as it faded from the hills. The radiance mounted higher and higher, like the flight of a lark, till it quivered upon the topmost peaks of the Coast Range and was gone. The strong man shivered beneath the kiss of night, and gazed upward into the empyrean of gathering darkness, soon to be studded with innumerable stars, but not yet. Would the stars ever shine again for him when the light of his eyes had vanished?

* * * * *

He recalled, during this bitter hour, his wife's theories of that mystic life beyond the grave; he pictured the myriads of the departed watching wistfully the pattern of that vast woof upon which each had laboured, awaiting its completion and the awards of the judge. Could there be rest or oblivion

in that host of toilers, some of whom had wrought well and faithfully—the few; and some of whom—alas! the many—had undone that work? Could a skilled craftsman view with indifference the destruction of his labour?

Then he bethought him of Damaris, of her love and enthusiasm for the beautiful, the pure, and the good. If what she held to be true was indeed so he must order his future work in such fashion as to please, not pain, this faithful soul. And, dwelling upon this thought, the circle which had first held himself and then Damaris, widened and widened, till it included all those loyal servants who had wrought in gold; and their sympathy and approval seemed no light thing. In a worldly sense he had always considered and prized the good opinion of others, of the living, whose approbation is of necessity a tangled skein of fancy hardly worth the unravelling; but this other thing, the praise of those who had laid aside prejudice, and saw no longer through a glass darkly, surely in this, and in this alone, might be found compensation for such as he.

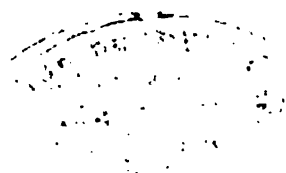
The doctor's step upon the *varandal* fell heavily upon his ears, and he hastened to meet him. In an agony of apprehension he perceived that the face of his old friend, as he stayed his advance near the fountain, was greatly agitated.

"She is gone," cried Chillingworth, stumbling forward with outstretched hands; "she is gone!"

"No," replied Lowly, clasping those trembling

fingers—"no; she is sleeping quietly. The bad symptoms have passed away. The pulse is almost normal; there is no fever. I think, nay, I am sure, that your dear wife will live. God in His infinite mercy has given her back to you."

THE END.



3

311



